

FEAR

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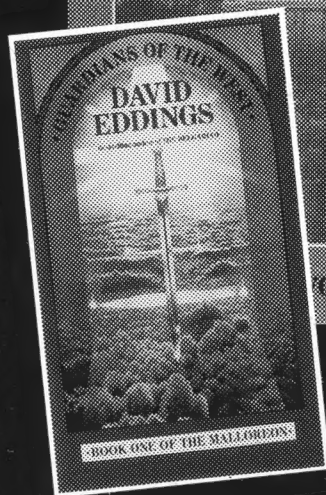
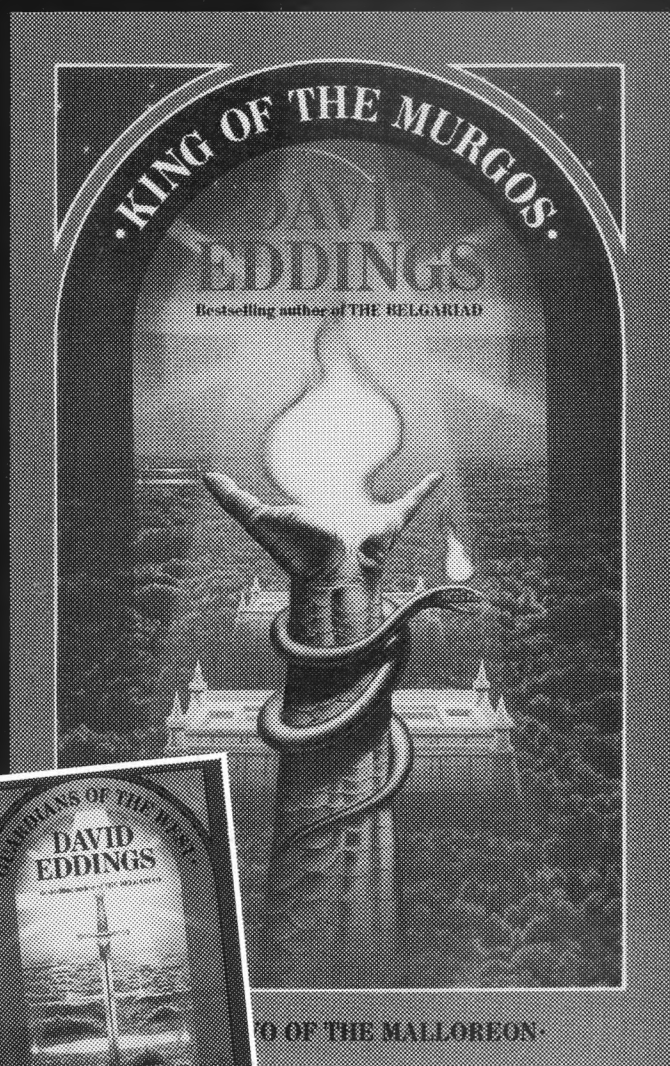
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FEAR

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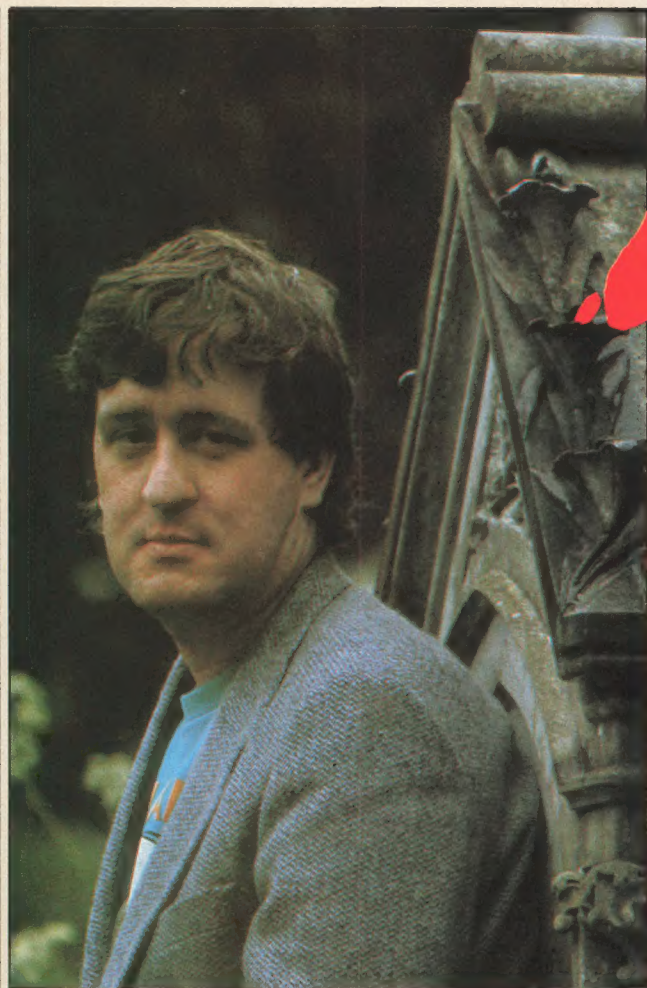
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Let's talk about the dark. I don't mean just the creepy, old, evil dark that reaches out, grabs you and chokes you until you're airless, lightheaded, and confused; or the dark that gets you when you're reading a horror novel or watching a gory film. No, I'm talking about the sort of limbo dark in which you can't tell what's out there or where it is because your imagination hasn't made up your mind.

The darkness I'm talking about is, however, situated in a place, a playground, in your mind. It might be dark now but when you start reading, watching a film, or reading **FEAR** a reflex action kicks in, the tarmac lightens to a grey, and the places, people and monsters appear. You can't stop them. They're within you, yours to cope with, perhaps pamper, but certainly not control.

And that's the excitement of fear; not knowing what an author or film maker will throw at you next, discovering that you can be awestruck, or horrified without having to go through physical pain or darkness.

That's the fun of fantasy, the

suspense of horror, and the reason for **FEAR**'s existence. We're here to provide you with everything you need to enjoy – yes, I said enjoy – the fantasy, horror and science fiction genres. We're not here to gross you out with explicit violence – we leave that to other magazines – but we won't shy away from covering events and films pictorially.

Neither will we be silent when the genres' creative people take a senseless bashing, as seems to be the case these days. When the critics from the national press, television and radio hammer our genres without reason, we're here to strike a balance.

HYPOCRISY AND THE PRESS

FEAR is here to provide the coverage that critics don't give popular films like *The Fly*, *Hellraiser*, *Beetlejuice* and *Nightmare On Elm Street* and books such as *Lightning*, from Dean R Koontz, *Swan Song*, from Robert R McCammon and *The Ghost King*, by David Gemmel. Most newspaper critics seemed to have signed an oath of hypocrisy.

Surely it is the depths of hypocrisy for those doyens of

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newspaper film pages to snigger at, or critically blast, well-made films just because of some fantasy or horror content. Okay, the jokes would be appreciated if they were funny, but most are forced, feeble or clichéd – such as the crack from the *Daily Express* about the green goo of John Carpenter's *Prince Of Darkness* canister looking like shampoo and Barry Norman's balding attempts at humour when he 'reviewed' the movie on *Film 88*.

It's such a shame. Barry Norman is a brilliant critic. He usually provides a balanced overview of the film world in his BBC1 slot. But, put him on a set with Clive Barker or Stephen King and the mocking tones start to dribble from his mouth.

It wouldn't be so bad if the movies these critics pan or, in the case of the *Daily Express* et al, ignore didn't turn up in the Film and Video Top Tens the week after release: but they do. And that, surely, is an argument for covering them adequately.

The same is true of books. Publishers, ever conscious of the popularity of fantasy and horror, put out dozens of titles a month, yet the national press would rather cover glossy books which illustrate the Queen's jewellery collection or

a paperback on what Monty did during the last war.

Fine. These books may have literary merit, but the majority of people who read the tabloids and watch review programmes on television read popular fiction and would no doubt appreciate at least some mention of it in the press. And to those critics who say the public shouldn't waste their time reading such 'tripe', the answer must be that at least they are reading.

SONGS TO SING

Most launch editorials tend to waffle on about what a clever person you are to part with your money and read the magazine; the rest of the populace are thick clods who wouldn't know a good buy if they saw one.

Well, I'm not like that but I do want to introduce our regular team – and a right bunch of misfits they are too. First, there's **Di and Mike Wathen** who will do their best to fill you in on the latest books. They're part of the British Fantasy Society's governing body so they'll also be helping out with our events guide.

Turn the page and you'll see **Philip Nutman's** face splurged across the opening page of

AMERICAN NIGHTMARES. You may already know him through the various US publications he writes for, and if you don't, you're going to be seeing a lot more of him this year as **FEAR's** American Editorial Consultant. He knows all that's worth knowing about the States, and a good few authors and film directors are numbered among his best friends.

Stanley Wiater, our Literary Associate, knows most of the big-name authors in the States. He's already given us an interview with the superb **Peter Straub**, is in the throws of interviewing **Dean R Koontz** and has interviews with some legendary genre stars in the coming months. His interviews have appeared in such salubrious publications as *Twilight Zone* and *Fangoria*.

Stan Nichols, our Editorial Associate, is a legend in his own nighttime – or so he tells me. His forté is interviews with the film world – sounds very surrealistic – and his pedigree ensures work for such august titles as *Rolling Stone* magazine. Next issue he'll be celebrating Dracula's birthday for us and giving us more gen on film director **Neil Jordan**.

Kim Newman is also a legendary mega-star. His work appears in *City Limits*, ITV's *Night Network* and a legion of fantasy magazines. He's just completed a book called *100 Best Horror Novels* with co-author **Stephen Jones** and has wide experience of the British fantasy scene.

David Keep, late of *Starburst*, has, as you can see, an interest in film censorship and you'll soon learn that he loves comicbooks and graphic novels. He's also in love ALF the alien – an affliction which, unfortunately, may not be cured before it can spill over onto the pages of **FEAR**.

Finally, **Oliver Frey** and **Roger Kean** who helped put this magazine together out of nothing more than a few pieces of cheesy-looking paper, some sticky tape, and some wet, stringy bits that have just gone in the bin.

Oliver's the brilliantly arty one with the spray can, marble-ising kit, and the patience of an angel. He's also the one who's not easily panicked. Roger, on the other hand, is the logistical one who makes sure we get into your sweaty little hands, as well as writing some of **FEAR's** obviously fab copy. Both are great genre fans.

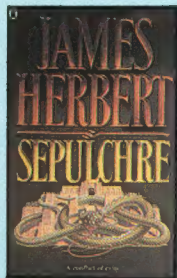
Okay, that's enough of the self-congratulatory mastication. Let's get on with the show.

Welcome to the Dark Playground . . .

John Gilbert
John Gilbert

THE CORRESPONDING FEAR

Readers' letters have always been an important part of any Newsfield publication, and **FEAR** is no exception. You won't find any in this issue, but don't hesitate to let us know what you think about the subjects covered in **FEAR**, the magazine itself and, most especially, your comments on Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction. Write to: **Letters Page, Fear Magazine, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB.**



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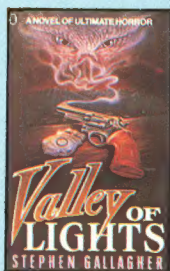
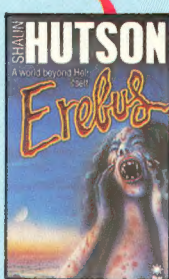


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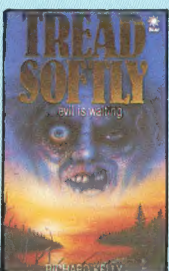
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CANNES CANNED

The Cannes Film Festival attracted a record number of fantasy film makers this year. Keen to show off their wares, be they big- or small-budget offerings, companies such as **Empire International** and **New World Pictures** vied with the lesser-known people like **Infinity Films** and **Manley Productions** for top hotel space. If you didn't have a suite at a seafront hotel you might just as well have not attended the film event of the year.

Première screenings, for the benefit of those who had money and were prepared to buy product, included *Return Of The Swamp Thing* – an attempt to transfer the comicbook antihero to the screen, while repairing the damage done by the original's video release, *Revenge Of The Radio Active Reporter*, *Maniac Cop* (there will be a preview in the next issue of **FEAR**) and *Prime Evil* which is a tale of modern American devil worship and nothing to do with the Bantam about-to-be-released short story anthology.

Britain's **Palace Pictures**, meanwhile, was boasting its '88 line up with screenings of **Neil Jordan's** *High Spirits* (see page 55) and *The Dream Demon* (featured in the next issue of **FEAR**.)

Not to be outdone, the Americans, in the form of **The Goldwyn Film Company**, showed off *Lady In White*, which had only wrapped post production a few weeks before

MONKEY HORROR BUSINESS

Monkeyshines, a futuristic psychological thriller from the pen of British author **Michael Stewart**, will soon be in the cinemas.

The movie, directed by **George A Romero** – of *Creepshow II* and numerous *Living Dead* movies, is about a crippled athlete who receives a monkey for a pet. No ordinary monkey this, though; it is highly in tune with its owner

and acts as his arms and legs. The animal has been given its intelligence by scientists who took brain cells from a human and transplanted them into the simian's brain. Unfortunately some of the less-pleasant urges which drove the brain cells' previous owner result in the monkey going on a killing spree.

Monkeyshines is a **Rank** film, and this year the distributor has

taken horror to its heart. Rank's 1988 releases also include **David Cronenberg's** controversial movie *Twins*. It's about two male twin gynaecologists who become interested in the same female patient. The movie is more psychological thriller than horror film but includes some fast-paced shocks which the Canadian director's fans will appreciate.

the festival. It has been variously described as a period ghost story, and a comedy thriller and bears a resemblance to a Wilkie Collins's mystery but brought up to date in a small American town.

Most of the movies shown at Cannes will go on US release within two months and, with the usual four-to-six month trans-Atlantic turn around, means Britain will get to see them in the autumn.



BLAZER NOT RAISER



When John Constantine, the occult detective, was launched on his adventures by **DC Comics**, the comic's name was to have been *Hellraiser*. We wonder what changed the company's mind?

Hellblazer, as it's now called, is a no-holds barred horror magazine which is quite happy to feature sex, violence, the Vietnam war, zombies, bugs, and demons. For that reason alone it is a unique publication and its on-staff writer **Jamie Delano** and illustrator **John Ridgway** are cutting quite a reputation amongst the growing band of *Hellblazer* addicts. The magazine is a cult, and the August issue is out now, priced approximately 80p.

GLEAMING DEMON



Games Workshop's Golden Demon Award competition is in its closing stages with the final held in Nottingham on July 30. Entrants have painted Citadel and Iron Claw miniatures. The best-dressed miniature will win its owner thousands of pounds worth of prize money – watch out for an on-the-spot report from the final in Issue 2 of **FEAR**.

On the sales front **Games Workshop** has been busy releasing some new miniatures. They include *Space Orcs* on the Prowl, *Imperial Storm Troopers*, *Eldar Mercenaries* and *Squats* who – if you didn't know – are dwarves in space. Blister packs containing one of these figures cost 60p, a pack of four costs £2.50 and larger models with plastic ready-to-assemble limbs cost £9.99 per box. More information from **Games Workshop, Enfield Chambers, 14-16, Low Pavement, Nottingham NG1 7DL**.

HIGHLANDER II: THE QUICKENING

The Cannes Film Festival held the promise of some fabulous fantasy and horror launches for later this year but it wasn't until the hysteria and hype had died down that we were able to determine the good deals from the dross.

First up fantasy; and a surprise for fans of the cult

movie *Highlander*. **Christopher Lambert** recreates his role as the timeless Scottish highlander, under the direction, yet again, of **Russell Mulcahy**. Advance word on the plot has it that Lambert is having to get used to his role as a mere mortal following the effects of 'The Quickening' – name of the new

movie – in the original film. He can, indeed, now procreate but is defenceless against the ravages of time and his adversaries.

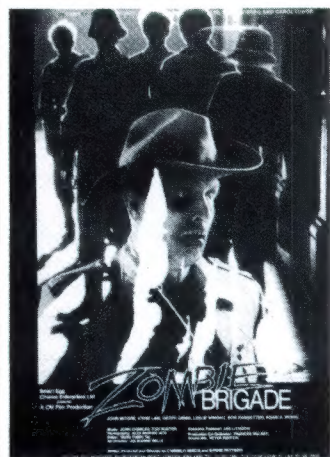
Highlander II: The Quickening is due for a December release in Britain and let's hope the storyline matches up to the special effects.



DIED LAUGHING

What happens when the director of *Evil Dead*, **Sam Raimi**, takes on the role of actor, and *Evil Dead II*'s co-writer becomes a director? You get a movie called *Night Crew: The Final Check Out* which focuses on the psychopathic zombie going ons at a supermarket where human flesh is stacked with the meat and veg. The movie is played for laughs, but so was *Evil Dead II* and look what a controversy that stirred up.

The other stars include **David Byrnes** and **Rene Estevez** – sister of Martin Sheen. You should (no doubt) look out for this one on video.



PLATOON – UNDEAD

Take *Return Of The Living Dead*, substitute American military for ordinary people, make them undead and you've got yourself a movie – at least **Smart Egg Productions** believes it has.

Zombie Brigade stars are mainly unknowns such as **Geoff Gibbs**, **John Moore** – not taking time off from parliamentary duties – and **Leslie Wright**. Script, production and direction duties are shared by **Carmelo Musca** and **Barrie Pattison**.

Smart Egg is the company responsible for Gary Brandner's new film *Cameron's Closet* so this zombie romp will probably be a cut above the usual Italian and Spanish affairs. The British release date has yet to be specified.



HELLBOUND

Hellraiser II: Hellbound, **Clive Barker**'s first stab at being executive producer, is set for a September release date in Britain.

Barker also wrote the film's storyline, but the screenwriter credit goes to one of his long-time friends, **Peter Ashley**. The story kicks off a few hours after the events of *Hellraiser* when **Kirsty Cotton**, again played by American actress **Ashley Lawrence** awakes after her terrifying ordeal at the hands of the Cenobites and finds herself at the Channard Institute – a psychiatric hospital. She meets Doctor Channard, played by **Kenneth 'Harvey Moon' Cranham**, who is more evil than he seems.

Channard is interested in Kirsty's tale of Cenobite demons, the reanimation of her uncle Frank's corpse and the death of her father and Aunt Julia. He persuades the police to bring the gore-stained mattress on which Julia died to the Institute and reanimates Julia by prompting Browning, a severely disturbed patient, to slash himself to death on it. Julia promises him the secrets of space and time if only he will find her victims on which she can feed and recreate flesh on her skinned body.

Meanwhile Kirsty is visited by her dead father who begs her to save his soul from the powers of Leviathan, Hell's master. She enters hell, with the help of a puzzle-ace called Tiffany, played by **Imogen Borman**, gets caught up with the Cenobites again and meets Leviathan.

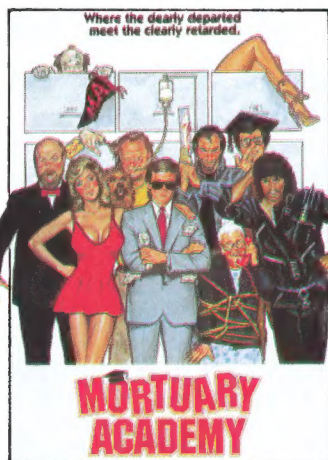
Clive Barker directed *Hellraiser* but is quite happy to take backseat on this film to **Tony Randell**. Barker is enthusiastic about the creative elements which Randell has brought to the film. 'Tony brings a freshness to the material and a passion for

science fiction that will tinge some of the material in a very interesting way. *Hellraiser* was a medium-budget horror movie with an emphasis on the bizarre, the outlandish and the surreal. Tony has taken the sequel in a slightly different direction, and we are opening up the storyline to actually visit the Hell from which the Cenobites were raised.'

Clive is currently working on a new novel for his publisher, **Collins**. His next literary launch is the release of *Weaveworld* in August, followed by a hardback novella called *Cabal* to be published in January 1989. *Cabal* will also be turned into a movie by Barker's own production company which is currently putting together a film based on the exploits of his occult detective, **Harry D'Amour**.

For news on all of Clive's latest projects read the interview in the next issue of **FEAR**.

BRAIN DEAD



Chris Atkins, of *Blue Lagoon* and *Dallas* fame, makes his big screen comeback as a streetwise student in **Landmark Films's** *Mortuary Academy* which should be with you in a matter of weeks. He's the clever one in this horror-comedy which includes neurotic teachers, vampish cheerleaders a mass murderer and a lot of undead students.

Good unclean fun, directed by **Michael Schroeder** with screenwriter credits going to **William Kelman**.

HOLY COMMUNION!

Remember when **Whitley Strieber** hit the headlines with *Communion*, his 'true' tale of the aliens who suddenly entered his life, stripped him naked and performed a lobotomy on his

mega-creative brain? Well, now you can see the film thanks to **Vestron Pictures**. The movie's about to finish location shooting and should be on your screen early next year.

PRIME EVIL INTENT

The world's greatest horror writers have banded together with editor **Douglas Winter** to produce *Prime Evil*, one of the most important short story anthologies to hit the shelves in years.

All the stories – from the likes of **Stephen King**, **Ramsey Campbell**, **Peter Straub**, **Whitley Strieber**, **Clive Barker** and **Jack Cady** – are new and will be published by **Bantam Press** in paperback on September 22, price £10.95. You, however, have a chance to win a copy signed by the authors at the World Fantasy Convention – see page 46.

BLACK MASS ON WEST END STAGE

Dennis Wheatley's black magic novel *The Devil Rides Out* is going musical thanks to the great man's grandson.

Despite the disastrous five-night Broadway run recently suffered in New York by the Royal Shakespeare Company's version of Stephen King's *Carrie*, **Dominic Wheatley** and business partner **Mark Strachan** are confident that if the show gets off the ground it will be a success.

Says Dominic: 'We recently bought the company which owns the rights to my grandfather's books from **Booker McConnell**. The people who wrote the musical *Time* approached us with some music and an adaption from the words in the book. Nothing is certain in showbusiness but we've seen a rough preview of the work; the music is good, and the next step is to set up record contracts, find a cast, and find a theatre.'

Is he worried that the horror scenes might misfire on stage and become a subject of ridicule – in much the same way as did the pig's-blood scenes in *Carrie*? 'There is only one scene that bothers me in that respect. That's when the Angel of Death comes in and claims the souls of those in the room and tries to break through the protective circle. That is one part that could look a bit silly.'

'The rest is fairly straightforward. I think that we just have to recognise that we can't be as flexible on stage as we could on film.'



UNITED ST

Fresh across the Atlantic from Philip Nutman

Spring in America usually means one thing for **FEAR** fans: summer horror movies are on their way. 1988 promises to deliver a bumper crop and the fun started early this year. Between April and May at least two genre films were being released per week. A first glance at the upcoming titles is encouraging, but whether or not the year will go down in the blood books as a vintage one remains to be seen. Only in New York could you choose between *Brain Damage*, *Retribution*, *Bad Dreams*, and *The Unholy*, all playing in theatres along the same street (42nd and Times Square, of course.) Then again, if the sleazy cinemas of Exploitation Row are not to your liking, all a terror buff need do is jump the subway uptown to catch *Beetlejuice* and *The Seventh Sign* at the Manhattan Twin on 59th street. Or *Critters 2* at the

Criterion on Broadway. Or **Adam Ant** and **Bruce Dern** getting up to post-apocalyptic high jinks in *World Gone Wild*, showing at various venues downtown.

Beetlejuice, the first of the April releases, certainly set a high note, grossing over \$8 million within its first two weeks of release. As **FEAR** went to press, the movie was well on its way to reaching the \$50 million mark!

Advance word on the flick was generally good (see my review this issue), though there was some confusion over its mix of comedy and the supernatural. The word was out: you won't be able to tell if it's a horror movie or a black comedy. It is, I'm happy to report, a comedy, and a real wacky one at that, but what else should one expect from **Tim Burton**, the talent behind *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*?

More on the best genre comedy since *Gremlins* elsewhere in this issue.

THE RETURN OF THE MOVIE BASED ON THE SEQUEL TO THE ORIGINAL

Hollywood does not thrive on originality. Never has done, and with the way things are going, never will.

Critters 2, *Nightmare On Elm Street 4*, *Phantasm 2*, *Friday 13th Part 7*, *Poltergeist 3*, *Frightnight 2*, *C.H.U.D. 2*, *Alien 3* (at least this one has a decent screenplay by lead Cyberpunk **William Gibson** of *Neuromancer* fame) . . . the list goes on and on.

Checking your local cinema listings is starting to seem disturbingly like the weekly football results.

But this frustrating situation reaches new levels of absurdity when you realise that film companies are already planning sequels well before the first picture is even in release. **Vestron**, for example, are already in preproduction on *Waxworks 2*, despite the fact that *Waxworks* is not due for US release until late-August, early-September.

Meanwhile, in Italy, **Dario Argento** and **Lamberto Bava** are prepping *Demons 3*, while **Lucio Fulci** has just completed directoral chores on *Zombie 3*.

As far as the US is concerned, advance word on *Phantasm 2* is encouraging, but the smart money is on *Hellraiser 2: Hellbound*.

Why the obsession with sequels? As a Hollywood scribe put it to me recently: 'It's a soap opera mentality. The studio heads, who are not renowned for their imaginative quality, believe in two things: a 'safe' bet (ie if the first one made money we can do it again), and the fact that they think movie audiences want to see the same characters go through similar situations. Frankly, the whole situation sucks. I mean, do I really want to write *Friday 13th Part 8*, or *Halloween 5*?'

Said scribe then made a beeline for the bar and was not seen again. But what do you think, **FEAR** fans? Are you growing tired of sequels? Write and let us know how you feel.

(Warning: one sequel to avoid is **Ken Weiderhorn's** *Return Of The Living Dead, Part 2*, which deservedly bombed in January and is destined to emerge on video here.)

KING OF THE DARK TOWER

Stephen King's latest book, a collection of interrelated short stories collectively called *The Gunslinger*, is to be launched by **Sphere** paperbacks in September.

The Gunslinger is a marked departure from King's other horror works. It tells the tale of Roland, the world's last gunslinger, who is in a constant search for a man in black and the Dark Tower. Both can provide keys to his destiny – but don't expect him to solve all his problems in the first book, *The Gunslinger* is just the first in a long, cyclic, series of novels and anthologies which King is still busy writing . . . despite his much publicised holiday from horror.

Watch out for the next issue of **FEAR** in which we will have an exclusive report on King's new fantasy world, its origins and development.



WEBBED WONDERS

No, it's alright, we don't mean the return of Howard the Duck, we're talking about **Marvel's Spiderman**.

You may remember several crude attempts to make *Spiderman* movies in the late-Seventies and early-Eighties. Well, **Cannon** has decided that it's time to have another go. As we go to press casting has yet to be fixed but *Webhead* will be directed by **Albert Pyun** from a script by **Don Michael Paul** and **Shepard Goldman**. Look for a UK release at Christmas.

EMPIRE FLOATS BACK

Gary Brandner, author of *The Howling* has been a busy lad. No sooner has he finished production on the film version of his novel *Cameron's Closet* – yet to be released in Britain in book or film form – than **Empire** snaps him up for an adaptation

of his novel *Floater*.

The script has been written by Gary, for a change, and is centred around the strange phenomenon of astral projection. **Tobe Hooper's** in the director's chair and the infamous **Charles Band** is producing. A release date hasn't been set yet but expect to see it in Britain in spring next year.

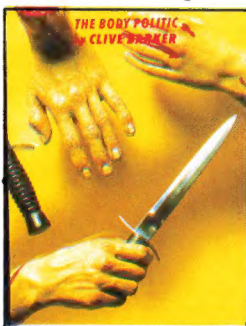
Meanwhile we're all awaiting the imminent release of *Howling IV: The Original Nightmare* which will soon be on cinema screens courtesy of **CBS/Fox**. Directed by **Michael Hough**, it stars **Romy Winsor** and **Michael T Weiss**. We're not sure what to expect but haven't heard Brandner disowning it yet.

Other imminent releases from **Empire** include *Pulse Pounders*, *Hack 'Em High* and *Entangled* for horror, *Transformations* for science fiction and *Assault of the Killer Bimbos* if you're into action comedies. All movies will be available on video during the summer.

HORROR TAPED

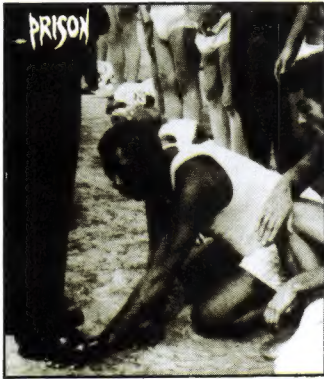
Clive Barker and **James Herbert** are now available on audio cassette from **Hamlyn Books** on Tape.

If you prefer to be read your horror fiction by a famous actor, put on your ear phones, sit back, and listen to **Bob Peck** with **Clive Barker's** *The Body Politic* or **Christopher Lee** with **James Herbert's** *The Fog*. The former comes across as largely unscathed from the editing process which is necessary to get it on three hours of tape. The latter, however, has been chopped and some of its more ghoulish scenes watered down. That said, both packages are excellent value for money at £4.99. It's just a pity that the original authors didn't read the stories onto the tape.



John Gilbert

ATES NEWS



HORROR DOESN'T COME TO YOUR HOUSE, IT GOES TO PRISON

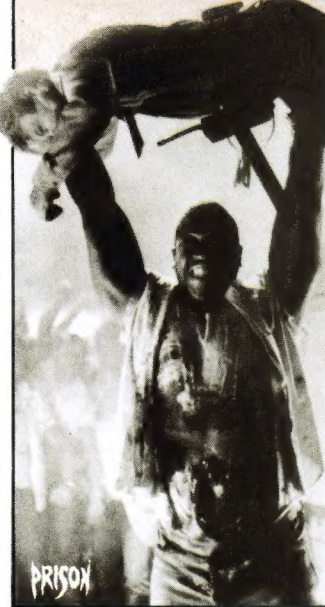
If nothing else, 1988 will go down in history as the year a new subgenre was created: prison horror movies.

Empire's Prison, currently

screening around the country, is the first of four similar movies to reach our screens. Other penitential delights we have to look forward to are *The Chair*, *Death House*, and *Slaughterhouse Rock*.

The first one, like *Prison*, is a ghost story, the second is a zombies-run-riot-in-the-slammer story, and the third is a teenagers-get-ripped-apart-in-Alcatraz saga. Actor **John Saxon**, Heather Langenkamp's father in the *Nightmare On Elm Street* flicks, makes his directorial debut with *Death House*.

The Chair, potentially the most interesting of the four, and hopefully the best of the bunch from what the **FEAR** editorial know, should have been the first to see the light of a projector had the project not run into a near-fatal mixture of finance/scheduling problems. The pic stars **Stephen Geoffreys** (*Evil Ed* in *Frightnight*, soon to be



seen in **Robert Englund's** 976-*Evil*) and the late-comedian, **James Coco**.

Death House stars TV regular **Dennis Cole** (one of those annoyingly familiar faces you recognise but can never put a name to), **Tane McClure** (the

beautiful blond daughter of Doug, *The Virginians's* Trampus), **Anthony Franciosa** (*Tenebrae*) and **Michael Pataki** (*Dracula's Dog*.) **John Saxon** also appears as the CIA chief responsible for authorising top-secret chemical experiments on Death Row prisoners.

Slaughterhouse Rock is a low-budget flick that's been kicking around the regional release circuit in the US for a few months and stars no one you've every heard of. For some reason or other, the film was pulled from its New York dates at the last minute, so we have no idea if it's worth looking out for. Our guess is: File Under Video.

The Chair and *Death House* will probably arrive here on video before the year is over.

FILMS IN PRODUCTION OR NEARING COMPLETION

WARLOCK

New World. Producer: Arnold Kopelson; Director: Steve Miner; Screenplay: DT Twohy; Cast: Julian Sands, Lori Singer, Richard E Grant.

THE WITCHES

Jim Henson Productions/Lorimar. Executive Producer: Henson; Producer: Mark Shivas; Director: Nicolas Roeg; Screenplay: Allan Scott, based on the novel by Roald Dahl; Cast: Anjelica Huston, Mai Zetterling, Bill Paterson, Rowan Atkinson.

CHILDSPLAY

United Artists. Producer: David Kirschner; Director: Tom Holland; Screenplay: Donald Mancini, Tom Holland; Cast: Catherine Hicks, Chris Sarandon, Brad Dourif.

THEY LIVE

Sunglasses Productions through Universal. Producer: Larry Franco; Director: John Carpenter; Screenplay: Frank Armitage; Cast: Roddy Piper, Keith David, Meg Foster, Raymond St Jacques.

WITCHCRAFT

Filmirage. Producers: Aristede Massaccesi, Donatella Donati; Director: Fabrizio Laurenti; Screenplay: Danielle Stroppa; Cast: Linda Blair, David Hasselhoff, Hildegarde Knef, Annie Ross.

C.H.U.D. 2

MCEG through Vestron. Producer: Jonathon Krane; Director: David Irving; Screenplay: Ed Naha. Cast: information not available at press time.

HALLOWEEN IV

Mayfair Productions. Executive Producer: Moustapha Akkad; Producer: Paul Freeman; Director: Dwight Little; Screenplay: Allen B McElroy; Cast: Donald Pleasence, Ellie Cornell.

GIRLFRIEND FROM HELL

Girlfriend From Hell Productions. Executive Producers: Alberto Lensi, Gregory Cascante; Producer-Director-Screenplay: Daniel M Peterson; Cast: Deborah Foreman, Anthony Hickox.

DR JEKYLL & MR HYDE - A JOURNEY INTO FEAR

Allied Entertainment. Producer: Edward Simons; Director: Gerard Kikoine; Screenplay: Jerry Filex, Ron Raley; Cast: Anthony Perkins, Glynis Barber.

WICKED STEPMOTHER

Larco Productions. Producer: Robert Littman; Director-Screenplay: Larry Cohen. Cast: Bette Davis, Barbara Carrera, Coleen Camp.

DRACULA 1989 (Title not final)

Dracula '89 Productions. Producer: Barin Kumar; Director: Deran Sarafian. Cast: Brendan Hughes.

AUTHORS ACTING IN MOVIES - A NEW TREND?

Rock stars have done their bit trying to prove they can act: Jagger in *Performance* and Ned Kelley; Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, *The Hunger* and *Labyrinth*; Art Garfunkel in *Bad Timing*. Now it looks like it's the turn of horror writers to do their cinematic thing.

Stephen King started it with his performance as a country bumpkin who turns into a plant in *Creepshow*, then did his Hitchcock cameo in the awful *Maximum Overdrive*. Now our cover stars, **John Skipp** and **Craig Spector** have a go.

The two lead members of the Splatpack recently made their movie debut in a down 'n' dirty low, low-budget feature entitled *Tin Star Void* that recently finished lensing in Connecticut.

Described as a 'post-modern rock 'n' roll western', the movie is like Walter Hill's *Streets Of Fire* in that it's set in a not-too-distant future/parallel world populated by *High Noon* heroes in cowboy punk attire pitted against *Miami Vice* villains controlling the mutated semi-*Blade Runner* landscape of a place called Hartford City, with the aid of street scum straight out of the *Mad Max* movies. The

heroes ride hot rods instead of horses, the bad guys use hi-tech firepower, and everything's covered in smog and saturated in neon glare.

Starring **Daniel Chapman** and **Ruth Collins** (the new queen of the B-movies: *Prime Evil*, *Psychos In Love*, *Hack 'Em High*), the film also features a prominent member of the **FEAR** editorial as the chief villain's right-hand man and **Debi Thibault**, star of *Psychos In Love*.

Skipp and Spector were available for one day only as they were in Connecticut for a signing session at a local bookstore. True to form, they will be credited as Splatpunks 1 and 2 and are killed off by said **FEAR** writer - who said we don't have tast?.

'It was a lot of fun,' Skipp said afterwards, 'can we do it again?'

The Splatpunk rock 'n' rollers are, as a consequence of their screen cameo, providing music for the soundtrack.

Tin Star Void will be a direct-to-video release.

Future movies that will include horror writers in supporting roles are *The Doomed* and *Psycho Night*.

RETURN OF THE UNDERSEA MONSTER MOVIE

Another trend which will feature prominently in the coming year is underwater *Alien* rip-offs. At the time of writing there are four in the works, all medium- to high-budget, all similar in concept and content.

Likely to be the most interesting, least disappointing, and certainly the best-made is

The Abyss, the next project from **James Cameron**, which is due to begin lensing before the summer's end, possibly in England. As with all his projects, plot specifics are being kept closely under wraps, though we can reveal the story involves the discovery of extra terrestrials on the sea bed and

Stan Winston is hotly tipped to provide the effects.

Due to complete principal photography the week this magazine hits your local news stand, is *Deep 6*, directed by **Sean Cunningham** (creator of the original *Friday The 13th*.) And if there are no further production problems, scheduled to wrap late summer is *Leviathan*, directed by **George Pan Cosmatos** of *Rambo* infamy, and starring Robocop himself, **Peter Weller**.

Advance word on *Deep 6* implies the story is a retread of classic Fifties B-movie clichés that pits a group of military scientists against an oversized crustacean sea creature (anyone for a *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea* revival? No? I thought not . . .)

Miguel Ferrer, the overambitious Yuppie from *Robocop*, stars in this one alongside **Greg Evigan** (*BJ And The Bear*), and **Cindy Pickett** from *St Elsewhere*, while the creature effects and special make-up are courtesy of **Mark Shostrom** and his regular crew of effects wizards headed by **Robert Kurtzman** and **David Kindlon**.

Leviathan, on the other hand, sounds very familiar. Too familiar in fact, if our sources are correct. A group of underwater miners pick up an alien virus on the sea bed, foolishly bring it on board their mining craft, and before you can scream Ridley Scott! begin to mutate into flesh-hungry monsters. So much for originality.

Then again, the plot may actually revolve around the concept of germ warfare. This conflicting report came from another of our Hollywood stringers who is prepared to swear on the Bible that this is the case. Even if he's right, does anyone really care?

Then to go from the sublimely stupid to the irredeemably moronic, there is *The Rift*, which is apparently a low-budget clone of *Leviathan*.

The latter originally started out as a **Dino De Laurentiis** production through his former, and now terminally-beleaguered DEG combo. With DEG stripping its production schedule down to a minimum, most projects in development have been sold off to other studios or were cancelled (fortunately, **David Cronenberg's** *Twins*, one such script that ran afoul of DEG's financial problems, has been resurrected and is nearing completion of post production to be released here next January.)

From what we understand Dino's cousin/son-in-law/nephew is shooting *The Rift* somewhere off the coast of Spain as you read this. Since *Leviathan* is apparently already over-budget and schedule, and now competing with two similar projects, why bother?

Film making. Don't you love it? The concepts of imagination, originality and logic seldom seem to apply any more, certainly as far as this genre's concerned.



NEW WORLD PICK UP SLUGS (RATHER THEM THAN US)

New World, *Hellraiser's* US distributor, have picked up Spaniard **Juan Piquer Simon's** film version of **Shaun Hutson's** *Slugs*, which, after being tested in Los Angeles, was shunted out on video last month.

'At least someone'll rent it,' said Mr Hutson on hearing the news. If his comment sounds less than enthusiastic it can be explained that we informed him a couple of days after Liverpool lost the FA Cup to Wimbledon. Being an ardent Kop supporter, Headhunter Hutson was understandably unhappy.

But on a brighter note, other producers are chasing his books like the written word was going out of fashion (which it is in America). The company that shot *Slugs* recently announced plans to make *Breeding Ground* - its sequel - for distribution next year, though no option deal had been signed according to the author ('Don't ask me, I'm always the last to know,' was his comment.)

However, I can confirm that *Spawn* has been optioned and the screenplay has been written, and a development deal is in the works, through an English company. Shooting may commence before the end of the year.

Hutson's final comment on being informed *Slugs* had made it to video was: 'I'm going shooting tonight. I hope there's a Wimbledon supporter holding the target.'

I think he was kidding, but with Shaun you never can tell.

NEW WORLD TAKE TWO

In addition to *Slugs*, **New World** recently released a sickie-quickie with the bizarre title *Alone In The T-Shirt Zone*. Story concerns a depressed t-shirt artist who wigs out to become a sexual psychopath instead and ends up in the nuthouse.

Sounds . . . er . . . unmissable.

US WRITERS STRIKE DELAYS NEW MOVIES

The Writer's Guild of America strike has seriously affected production of films due next year. **Tobe Hooper's** *Floater* (from the **Gary Brander** novel) is in limbo at Empire, and *Evil Dead* auteur **Sam Raimi**, who has a two-picture deal with Universal, is in the same position. The strike has also delayed the start date of Laurel Entertainment's new series

Monsters, the anthology show scheduled to replace cancelled *Tales From The Darkside*.

Since the strike is likely to run until September it looks as though releases will be thin on the ground next spring, though various independent productions will probably be picked up for theatrical distribution as a result.

MORE LOVECRAFT HORRORS

Stuart Gordon, director of *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*, is currently hard at work on a new picture based on an HP Lovecraft story, though due to a preproduction press ban I cannot reveal which one this issue.

'I'm sorry about that,' he apologised from his Hollywood office, 'but the financiers have decided not to make any announcements at this time. As soon as I can discuss the project in detail I will.'

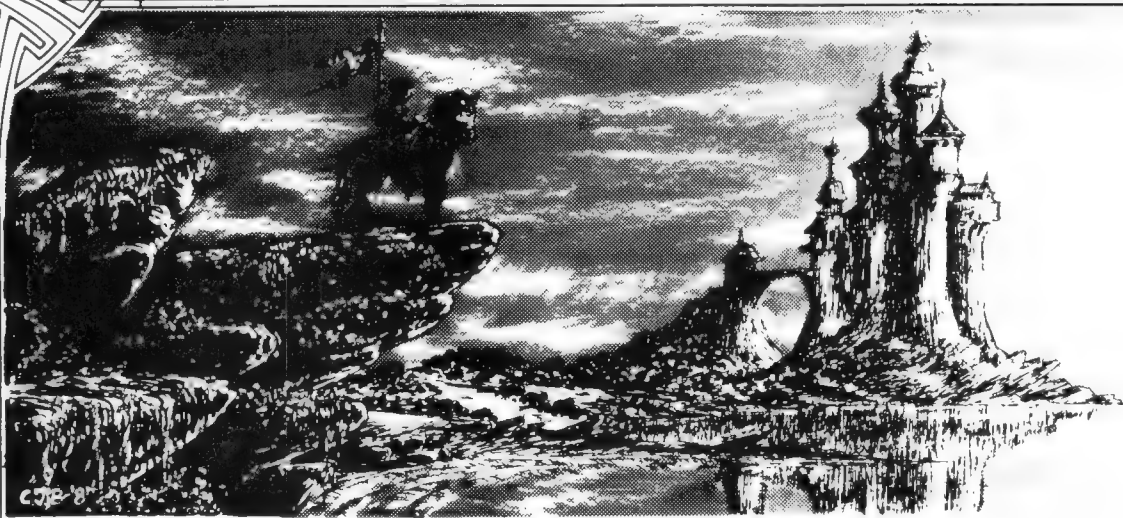
I can, however, reveal the film, Gordon's fifth in four years, has a substantial budget, an excellent script, and will probably feature the work of no less than three major special effects make-up artists, including **Dick Smith**, and that highly regarded comicbook artist **Berni Wrighton** (*Swamp Thing*, *Cycle Of The Werewolf*, etc) has drawn the preproduction character designs. Principal photography is due to roll for ten weeks in August.

In the mean time, Gordon fans can look forward to the release of *Robojox*, his long-awaited science fiction picture, an action-adventure story from a screenplay by Nebula-award winning writer **Joe E Haldeman**.

'As we speak, **David Allen** is somewhere out in the Californian desert filming the final stop-motion effects,' he explained, 'and Empire are aiming for a late September opening date.'

'Initial reaction to the picture has been very encouraging,' he continued. 'I think audiences are going to have a lot of fun with it.'





AVALON

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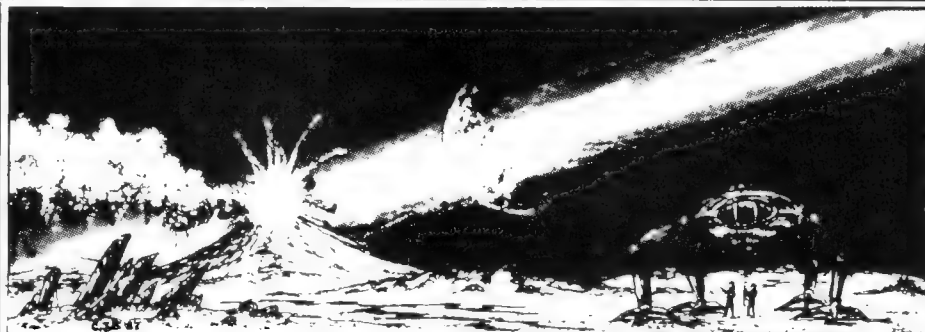
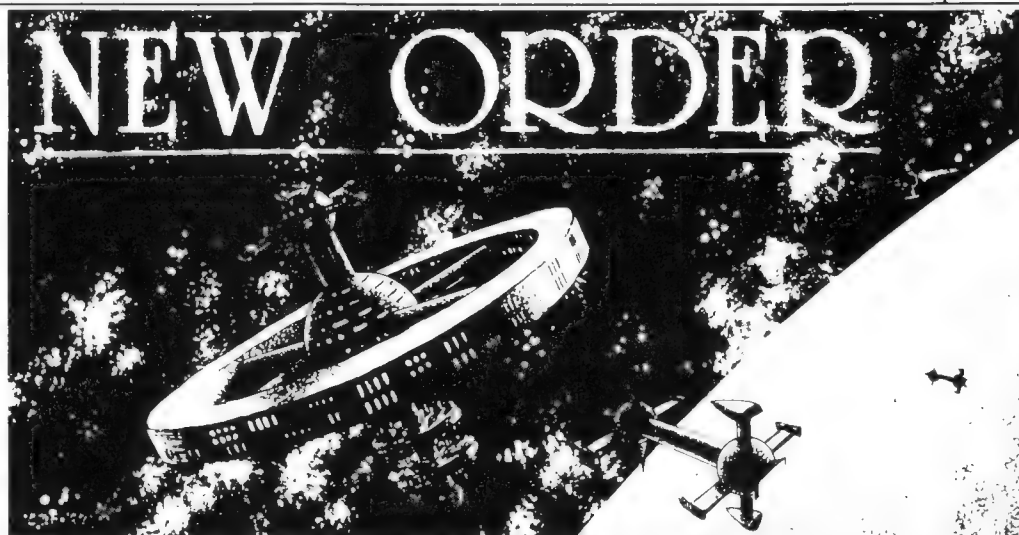
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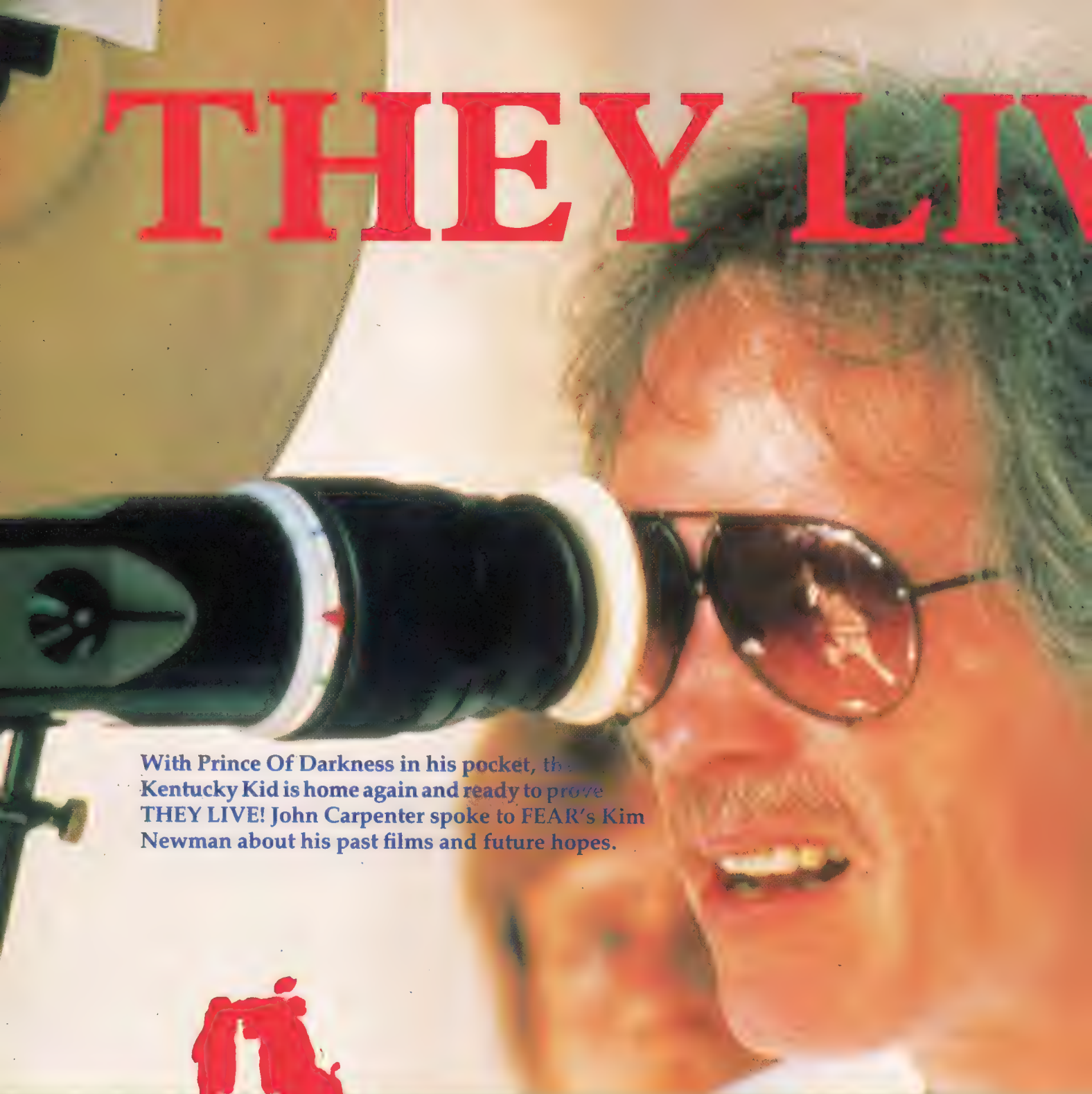
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THEY LIVE



With *Prince Of Darkness* in his pocket, the Kentucky Kid is home again and ready to prove **THEY LIVE!** John Carpenter spoke to FEAR's Kim Newman about his past films and future hopes.

A

dyling priest. An ichorous green cylinder in a near-derelect Los Angeles church. A shuffling group of sinister, perhaps demonic, vagrants led by Alice Cooper. Donald

Pleasence mumbling over a roman collar as a churchman who learns too much about his closed order, the Brotherhood of Sleep. A group of scientists under the command of an eccentric, Nobel prize-winning Chinese physicist. Dream messages from the future, warning against ancient evil. Multiple

deaths. Zombies animated by insects or a squirt of green goo. A Lovecraftian creature beyond a rippling mirror. Pustules. Bizarre phenomena in deep space. Creepy-crawlies. These are the ingredients of the witches' brew John Carpenter stirs up in *Prince Of Darkness*, the first of four low-budget pictures he has contracted to make for producers Shep Gordon and Andre Blay of Alive Films – *The Whales Of August* – which is the cinema arm of Alive Enterprises, a talent agency which has expanded into music, television and video.

In *Prince Of Darkness*, Carpenter is trying to prove that you can go

home again. The director started out as a Kentucky kid who read *Famous Monsters* and published a fanzine, *Fantastic Films Illustrated*, while in his mid-teens.

The issue I've got makes interesting reading: a long letter from teenage fan Tim Stout – now a novelist, with *The Raging* to his credit – about his trip to visit Hammer Films at Bray Studios, and an editorial by 'John H Carpenter' in which he laments – in 1964 – 'Has sensationalism taken over the true form of the films? Is box office the only qualification a script must have before filming is considered?'. He lambasts Forrest J Ackerman of *FM* as 'a mercenary who will

VE!



par. When producers like Herman Cohen, Bert I Gordon, and Herschell Gordon Lewis are patronised for films like *Village Of The Giants*, *Blood Feast*, *Black Zoo*, *Mutiny In Outer Space*, etc, while films like *Unearthly Stranger*, *Blood And Roses*, and *These Are The Damned* come and go so quietly and unsuccessfully that no one knows of them, then fantasy is in danger. Have we forsaken such producers as Val Guest, Val Lewton, and Roger Corman who have left the ranges of fantasy for 'bigger pickings'? Our top horror stars of today, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, are given minor, meaningless roles, and are not billed for what they are, while such movie mogul makers as William Castle and such are billed as 'masters of horror'. To some, fantasy is more than just the sensationalism and terror that is now the figurehead of the Grand Guignol style. It is a probe into the imagination of a human being(s), a logical projection of the future to point up the follies and anachronisms of present-day man, a study in the dark-patterned behaviour of people. Is it to die, like its globs, and its little green men, and its *Batmen*, like passing fads or fancies? The answer to the question may become evident sooner than one may realise.'

The prose may be awful – 'I'm sorry, it's where I was in those days', Carpenter confesses – but the sentiments are remarkably similar to those the director is still expressing about fantasy films and about working in Hollywood.

THE ELECTRIC DUTCHMAN FLIES

In his teens, Carpenter also made 8mm masterpieces inspired by Fifties monster movies: *Revenge Of The Colossal Beasts*, *Gorgo Vs Godzilla*, *Terror From Space*, *Warrior And The Demon*, and *Gorgon The Space Monster*. Carpenter first made his mark in 1974, with *Dark Star*, a student film made in collaboration with Dan O'Bannon – later the original screenwriter of *Alien* and *Blue Thunder* and director of *Return Of The Living Dead*. The movie was picked up by exploitation mogul Jack H Harris, who had put out such goodies as *The Blob* and *4-D Man* and injected some cash into *Fantastic Films Illustrated* contributor Mark McGee's lousy *Equinox*.

Harris allotted minimal funds for the expansion of the short *Dark Star* – originally titled *The Electric Dutchman* – into a feature film which got some sort of cult recognition for its weirdness and mix of SF with humour, but didn't really dent anyone's box-office records – effects footage from the movie recently turned up in Harris's *Prison Ship: Starslammer*, directed by the redoubtable Fed Olen Ray.

Carpenter followed through with *Assault On Precinct 13*, an urban Western modelled on *Rio Bravo* and *Night Of The Living Dead*, which also didn't win any popularity awards, but wowed them at the London Film Festival in 1977. In that National Film Theatre audience was producer Irwin Yablans, who was looking around for a director to do justice to an idea he had called *The Babysitter Murders*, about a psycho who terrorises babysitters. Yablans contracted Carpenter, and also said it'd be a good idea to set the film on Hallowe'en Night to give the film a good title and a spooky background. *Halloween* became a major box-office hit, and the big-time lured.

LURED BY MEGABUCKS

At this point, the invariably insightful critic David Thomson wrote of Carpenter: 'He is one of the very few really able directors working in America today, and it cannot be long before someone insists that he work with a big budget – cheap films frighten financiers more than blockbusters should. But Carpenter knows that is one way to betray RKO vitality. Big budgets mean commercial decisions and projects compromised by profit-sharers and residual artists. He may prove most valuable and salutary as a crusader for small pictures made with a craftsman's care and understanding. If he can retain that precarious ground.'

But, in the short term, Carpenter was pulled – as Thomson predicted – towards the megabucks made fashionable in the late-Seventies by Spielberg and Lucas. After marking time with largely enjoyable, slightly more expensive actioners like *The Fog* and *Escape From New York*, not to mention a television biopic on Elvis Presley with his perennial leading man Kurt Russell, and a Movie-of-the-Week called *Someone's Watching Me* – aka *High Rise*, with Lauren Hutton – Carpenter was drawn to big studios and the gargantuan budgets for the colossal remake of *The Thing* and a succession of slick, expensive fast food movies: *Christine*, *Starman*, *Big Trouble In Little China*.

Not only was he given a critical pasting on these projects – for me the predigested pap of *Starman* is his worst – but also he had to suffer from all the problems attendant on making hugely expensive movies, not the least of which is that he's never really had a major league home run – none of his big movies has performed as well as his cheapies used to do. And to cap it

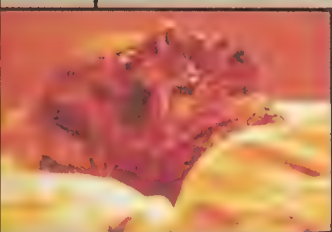
"If I had three wishes, one of them would be 'send me back to the Forties and the studio system and let me direct movies'."

devote almost 50 percent of his space to insipid trash – in the most recent issue to date, *Frankenstein Conquers the World*, *Frankenstein Meets The Space Monster*, etc – while films of quality are overlooked'. And in the same issue there is a defence of the youthful Carpenter's fondness for Italian muscle spectacles, and a state-of-the-genre summation that could, if you changed the film titles and producers' names, stand today. 'I fear for the life of fantasy films,' Carpenter wrote. 'Just as the muscles and mythology films died from overexposure and disappointments, so may the films of fantasy demise because of promising films that are way below





Big Trouble In Little China



"... being a young film-maker is kind of a drag. You waste so much."

all, for-the-money scripts he wrote during his apprenticeship have turned up as commercial and/or artistic disappointments like Irvin Kershner's *The Eyes Of Laura Mars*, Stewart Raffill's *The Philadelphia Experiment* and Harley Cokliss's *Black Moon Rising*. Now, he's worked out a deal whereby he shoots four independent, relatively low-budget quickies, of which *Prince Of Darkness* is the first, without having to deal with the hassle of the monolithic studios.

LIVING OUT OF TIME

'I found myself making big studio movies, and Hollywood recently has become extremely confusing,' says Carpenter. The business is not very much fun. The directors are back down to the level of hired hands. I wasn't having fun any more, so I decided to make independent films. I was lucky enough not to have to worry financially, and so I was able to rediscover the fun of making movies.'

Carpenter once said: 'If I had three wishes, one of them would be 'send me back to the Forties and the studio system and let me direct movies'. Because I would have been happiest there. I feel I am a little bit out of time. I have much more of a kinship for the older style films, and very few films that are made now interest me at all. I get up and walk out on them'.

Now that he has ironically got his wish by getting away from the corporate ghosts of the old Hollywood studios and found a means to be prolific in the independent sector, he adds, 'It had to be better than it is now. Everyone was under contract. It was a very different system, and probably a lot more fun. The folks who headed the studios actually liked films.

'It's not that way any more. I don't mind pouring money into

pictures, but with a £35 million budget, you have to make choices in the film that are for commerce rather than creativity, because you are forced to make a return for investors. I don't like having to deal with a lot of ruthless, unsympathetic folks. And I don't think it challenges you if you play it safe. If somebody says you have £30 million, you can't fool around. I don't care what anybody says, but unless you enjoy spending money like that there's no point. I mean, there are so many people in the world who could use that kind of money for something important, like feeding themselves.

'I may go back to the studios at some time, of course, if the project is right. I'm not saying I'm beyond being seduced.

'These films are in profit before I start shooting, on presales and overseas rights. So there's no pressure to make it more commercial. These movies can be different. America always wants you to reflect the middle class in movies, and they always want to see themselves in a good light. This is my reaction against the Eighties. The new young guys who are coming up are poisoned by MTV. Their films all have great lighting and cutting styles and interchangeable scripts. I think 'this is good work', and that's where it goes wrong, because if you're in the audience thinking 'this is good work', there's something missing. There's nothing really passionate about it.

'If it's too slick, it's no fun. You gotta have mistakes. But, just now, boy, do we think we're fancy, boy do we think we're hip! I can't stand it.

'I noticed something recently. Critics have started to call me 'veteran director John Carpenter'. I'm 41 years old now. Only ten years ago I was a young film-maker. Actually, being a young film-maker is kind of a drag. You

waste so much. It's really true what they say about youth being wasted on the young.'

ON HALLOWED GROUND

By returning to the horror field, and with Donald Pleasance again top-billed, Carpenter could be said to be revisiting the site of his most influential film. Indeed, there is hardly an aspect of *Halloween* that hasn't been imitated by the horde of calendar-plundering mad-slasher films that ripped it off.

'I'm very flattered. I understand the reasons for doing that. We made *Halloween* and had a great time, and I can see why everyone borrows from it.

'It's really weird. This time I didn't want to make a movie about a bunch of teenagers in a house. I wanted to make a movie about theoretical physicists - and they're a different breed. Quantum mechanics just fascinates me, it's so wonderful and mystical, and it struck me that that would be a terrific background for a good old-fashioned horror film.

'The physics in *Prince Of Darkness* is all very true and accurate and a lot of it is what people don't wanna hear. It's very difficult to explain and when you explain it, it hurts your head. It truly says that logic and reality aren't what they say they are. On the smallest levels everything goes crazy. There are so many good quantum physics stories: I have one I'm working on with Dennis Etchison, which we're having trouble knocking into shape.

'Dennis is a terrific writer. I tried to get him to play a part in the movie, for while. He would have been the guy who gets killed with the bicycle.'

AWAY FROM STARKNESS

Etchison, one of the best writers of short horror in the field and editor of the recent *Cutting Edge* anthology, first worked with Carpenter by doing the novelisation of *The Fog*, *Halloween II* and *Halloween III: Season Of The Witch*. The character who gets it with the bicycle in *Prince Of Darkness* is named 'Etchison' to commemorate the fact that the author's name was misspelled on the cover of *The Fog*; he penned *Halloween II* - which is a lot better than the movie - as Jack Martin.

According to Etchison, who has turned out a screenplay for an aborted *Halloween IV* and is currently working on *Boogeyman III*, Carpenter screen-tested him for the role of 'the wimp with glasses who gets killed', but turned him down because he was too good to

appear in the film. Since the writer's appearances in the short version of his classic story *The Late Shift* – *Killing Time* – and Larry Cohen's *Island Of The Alive: It's Alive III* have landed on the cutting room floor, one suspects Etchison's screen career will not earn him a star on Hollywood Boulevard.

Many horror directors – Wes Craven and Tobe Hooper, for instance, and even David Cronenberg – have mellowed since making their gruesome early features. *Prince Of Darkness*, although it features possessed zombies, hordes of icky bugs, and several bizarre deaths, doesn't go for the throat in the way *Halloween* or *The Thing* do.

I'm always drawn to fantasy as opposed to stark realism. I always think fantasy films are challenging. You're dealing with things the audiences know aren't true. *Prince Of Darkness* certainly isn't a gritty, extreme movie. But that just depends on the story.

You always want to do stories with some heart in them. I might

cooperate in the face of an ancient and evil force.

'They are all isolated individuals who have to face this problem. One of the reasons that the film is not warmer than it is is that these people can't make connections. It was much the same in *The Thing*. That movie is about people who are unable to trust each other.

'It was nice going back to having total control. I have a lot of people who help me, but I'm the creative force behind the projects. It's where I started.'

Although Carpenter is credited as director and producer of *Prince Of Darkness*, the screenplay is attributed to a new but familiar name: 'Martin Quatermass is a very cooperative writer, I get along with him very well. We have almost simultaneous ideas. Martin Quatermass has a brother, Bernard Quatermass, who used to head the British Experimental Rocket Group in the Fifties, and if you've seen *The Quatermass Experiment*, you might remember him in the form of Brian Donlevy.



By returning to the horror field, and with Donald Pleasance again top-billed, Carpenter could be said to be revisiting the site of his most influential film – *Halloween*

want to do that again some time. Oh, being impaled on a bicycle wasn't that gritty. We needed to use some kind of junk and it was lying around. Alice Cooper, who plays the bike-wielding devil-worshipping wino in the film, once impaled someone on a mike-stand during his stage show, so we kind of got the idea from him. You don't sit around dreaming up new ways to kill people, because that just gets mechanical.'

QUATERMASS – PIT AND PENDULUM

Nevertheless, *Prince Of Darkness* is a very dark film, with a group of central characters who don't like each other and singularly fail to

'There's a lot of *Quatermass And The Pit* in the film, [see side panel] and also *The Stone Tape* – a play by the author of the Quatermass series, Nigel Kneale. He is one of my heroes. I loved working with him when I had him write *Halloween III: Season Of The Witch*, although he wound up taking no credit. But he was working with Tommy Lee Wallace as a director on *Halloween III* and unfortunately Nigel wanted to make a very pessimistic film. The choices were made to go a little bit more for an audience film. His screenplay was terrific, but very down. His work has gotten much more pessimistic recently, and of course there's nothing wrong with that. If I'd been directing the film, I might

very well have gone along with him.'

Tom Atkins, star of *Halloween III* and other Carpenter projects, claims that another reason for rewriting Kneale's screenplay was that the Manx author had made the Irish look too bad in his depiction of a townful of Celtic pagans. It remains to be seen whether Nigel Kneale will appreciate the tribute of the Martin Quatermass credit.

THEY'RE ALIVE!

In the past, Carpenter has several times tried to get his screenplay for *El Diabolo*, an epic Western, into production, and been stalled by the current, post-*Heaven's Gate* state of the the genre.

'I've made a bunch of Westerns, I just don't put cowboy hats on 'em. Instead of cowboys, you have physicists. *Big Trouble* was a Western, *Escape From New York* was a Western, and *Assault On Precinct 13* was certainly a Western. Who knows, maybe I'll get down to doing it for real one day.'

He has also decided not to go on with the often-announced *Halloween IV* – 'I've sold the rights to Moustapha Akkad. I didn't want this thing on my back any longer. It's off my hands' – and grown leery of attempting any more literary adaptations, like his filming of Stephen King's killer car epic, *Christine*.

'The trouble with adapting books is that you're really coming in second fiddle. I was not very happy with *Christine*. It's a very ordinary movie because it's a very ordinary story. I was faithful to the characters in the book, but I was more interested in Arnie's transformation than in the effects stuff. I came onto it off *The Thing*, which was an enormously ambitious film. On that we had the effects and that's all we had. On *Christine* I was fed up with all that. I just didn't want to see any more rubber on the floor.'

Carpenter is, however, now ready to start shooting on his next low-budget movie, a comedy/action/science fiction film: *They Live* is also a political satire. It boldly states that the Reagan Revolution is run by aliens from another planet.'

Has he been following the current presidential campaigns for material? 'Only as an amused observer. It's so much fun. People really do take it seriously. I love this Pat Robertson guy, he's such a ridiculous idea. Truly, it will be the fellow who's craziest who runs the country. Boy, it's a joke. People so lack a sense of humour. Everyone is so brainwashed over here. I don't think they'll get the joke of *They Live*. But what the hell, it's what I want to do . . .'



QUATERMASS AND THE PIT

It's 30 years since the BBC first televised the classic science fiction series starring Andre Morell as Professor Bernard Quatermass and left British audiences unsettled and often terrified. Now BBC Video has released a 178-minute single video cassette containing all six episodes (PG Rating) available at most sell-through video outlets at £9.99. Don't miss it!

'I've made a bunch of Westerns, I just don't put cowboy hats on 'em. Instead of cowboys, you have physicists.'





BY
SHAUN
HUTSON

.1.

D

eadline.

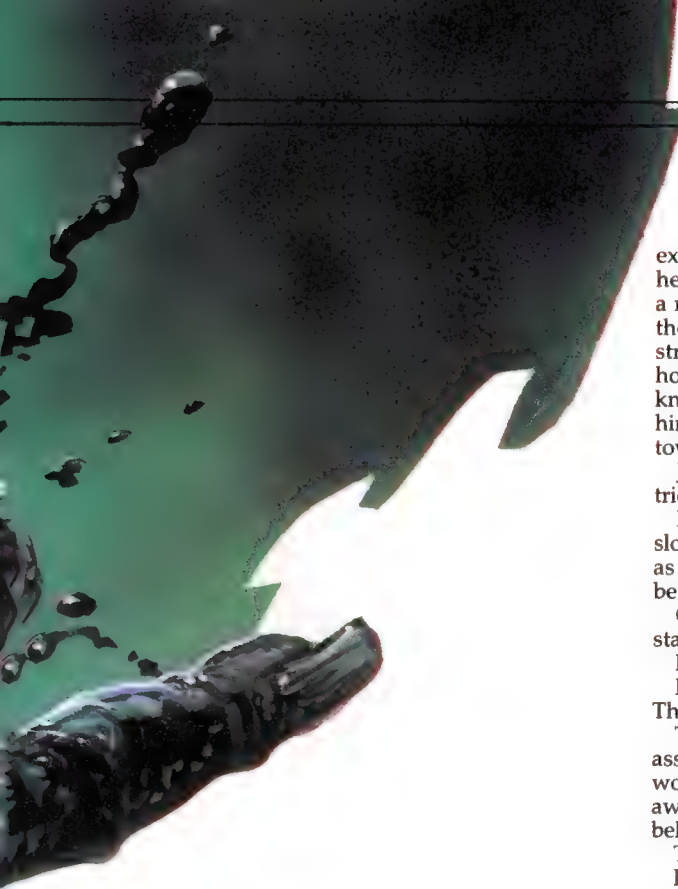
The word seemed to be stuck in his mind like a splinter in flesh. He couldn't shift it.

Deadline.

He repeated it out loud to himself, gazing down at the copy which lay before him. There was less than five minutes to deadline and the story he needed still hadn't been 'phoned through to the office. He checked the screen of the VDU as if miraculously expecting the story to appear before him, but of course no such miracle was forthcoming. Roger Galloway looked at his watch then across the office to the wall clock. They both showed the same time.

Another five minutes and he'd have lost the story. He tapped the end of his pencil against the keys of the computer, occasionally hitting one too hard so that a small green letter would flash into view before him.

Deadline.



expecting to see the marks left by that bony claw, but he smiled thinly, remembering that it had merely been a recurrence of the nightmare he'd lived through for the past two nights. It always came when he was under stress. Always the same images. Its frequency however, had not lessened its power and Galloway knew the only way to calm his nerves now. He swung himself out of bed and padded across the room towards the landing, towards the stairs.

Just one whisky, he told himself. It always did the trick.

He sucked in a more relaxed breath, his heart slowing down, his body beginning to loosen up more as the images of the dream gradually faded like mist beneath a warm sun.

Galloway had reached about half-way down the stairs when he heard the noise from below.

From the sitting room he guessed.

It sounded as if an ornament had been knocked over. The crash was followed by silence.

The editor paused, gripping the banister as if to assure himself that he was not still dreaming. The wood felt cold beneath his clammy grip. He was awake. Wide awake and aware of the sounds from below.

There was movement.

Intruders?

He remained where he was, wondering if he should go on and investigate or go back to his bedroom and ring the police. If he went on there was no telling what he might find. There could be more than one burglar. The bastard could be armed. Discovered he might choose to fight. But, if Galloway rang the police what guarantee did he have that they would reach him in time? What if the intruder decided to check out the upper storey of the house?

In the umbrella stand beside the sitting room door was a heavy walking stick, the end sporting a silver dome. Galloway decided it would make a suitable weapon. He edged down the remaining stairs towards the sitting room door, his eyes never leaving it, expecting it to open any second.

It didn't.

From beyond he could still hear sounds of movement, but more furtive now, as if the intruder had realised he'd been discovered.

What if he was waiting? Galloway thought.

He seized the heavy walking stick and hefted it in front of him, his free hand closing on the door knob of the sitting room. He gritted his teeth, turned the knob, pushed open the door and stepped in, his hand slapping on the light.

The figure had its back to him as he entered.

"Right you bastard," hissed Galloway, his fear now having given way to anger.

The figure turned slowly and looked at him.

Galloway froze. It was as if iced water had been suddenly injected into his veins. His body seemed to stiffen, but, as it did, he felt the first massive crushing pain in the centre of his chest. His body began to shake uncontrollably and the walking stick dropped from his hand as pain spread across his chest to his left arm and up the side of his neck and head.

It felt as if someone were inflating his body, filling it until it must burst.

White lights danced before his eyes and his mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water.

"Oh my God," he croaked.

Then the figure moved towards him.

.2.

The room was filled with cigarette smoke. It hung like a dirty grey curtain across the table in the centre of the room. Vic Bradley lit up another Dunhill and added more fumes to the choking mist. He sat to the right-hand side of the table, tapping his pencil



SHAUN HUTSON is, at 29, Britain's youngest master of the gore novel and king of dark humour. He is also among the top three bestselling horror novelists in the UK; the others being James Herbert and Stephen King. When he's not on the road with heavy metal bands, such as Iron Maiden, he's writing novels with the titled quaintness of *Slugs*, *Victims* and *Assassin*. Learn *Assassin's* dark secrets in the next issue of FEAR.

The word was synonymous with Fleet Street. A cliché in itself, but he was the editor of the largest-selling tabloid in the country. Clichés were his bread and butter. Just like the story he was expecting about a top model who had, at one time, slept with a member of a prominent, though almost extinct, European royal family and given him a dose of syphilis. Just the thing the public expected and wanted to read over its morning cornflakes.

Galloway reached for the 'phone.

The hand erupted from beneath the desk, punching its way through the thick wood, fingers flailing, reaching for the editor's outstretched wrist and quickly closing around it.

Galloway screamed and fell backwards from his seat and, as he did so, the arm beneath the desk came with him.

It had been severed at the shoulder but still those bony fingers held him like a reeking vice. He could see the ligaments through the peeling skin, could see the thick veins throbbing like engorged leeches about to burst, replete with corruption.

The stench filled his nostrils as he tried to pull himself upright, to shake the monstrosity loose.

His other hand reached out towards the VDU screen. He felt his fingers touch the cool glass then suddenly it seemed to dissolve.

The screen opened like a mouth.

The top and bottom slid open like lips, welcoming his hand and he felt an unbearable warmth envelop his hand and arm as the screen sucked him in. His fingers groped in something warm and reeking.

Something which moved.

He looked up to see that thousands of tiny white and yellow forms were writhing insanely inside the mouth of the screen.

Maggots covered his hand, some spilling onto the keyboard.

Galloway screamed. And screamed. And woke up.

He was propelled from the dream by his own rapid breathing. The editor sat bolt upright in bed, his body covered in a sheen of perspiration which had soaked his pyjamas. He blinked myopically, looking around him in the darkness of his room, trying to force the last residue of nightmare from his mind. His breathing gradually slowed and he ran a hand through hair which was matted with sweat. His hand, he noticed, was shaking. He looked at his wrist as if

Maggots covered his hand . . .



**They found
the poor sod
dead at home
last night.**

gently against the pad before him. Beside him was Bob Richmond, the sports editor, a sad looking man with deep-set eyes that were forever flicking back and forth. Richmond was chewing on his thumb nail, spitting the pieces into the ashtray before him. Peter Maddox, the assistant editor, sat at the head of the table, flicking through a pile of printouts. He'd been with *The Mercury* fifteen years, having joined about two months before Bradley himself, who, as senior news editor, had controlled his part of the paper with vigour and efficiency during his time.

It was toward the other man in the room that Bradley looked.

Frank Dean was in his early-forties but looked ten years younger. Just the tiniest hint of grey at his temples gave him a somewhat distinguished look which was, to a certain extent, cancelled out by the bottle scar which ran from the corner of his mouth to the lower lid of his right eye. It gave him the appearance of having a perpetual sneer.

He had bought the paper and also taken on the roll of senior editor just over six months ago. After initially good sales *The Mercury* had begun to lose readers and now, as Bradley drew heavily on his cigarette, he knew that this meeting had been called to discuss the paper's slide. There was a circulation war on again and *The Mercury*, it seemed, was short of ammunition.

"I'm not going to beat about the bush," said Maddox, getting to his feet. "You know that circulation figures have been falling steadily for the last month or so. We're now fourth. That's not good enough. The other papers are coming up with exclusives."

"You mean they lie more convincingly than we do?" Bradley offered.

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean," Maddox told him. "Christ, we're a family newspaper. If you can't get facts, make them up. The public don't care about truth. They want a good story. You're journalists, not writers."

"It doesn't come down to that Peter, and you know it," Bradley said. "The other tabloids are printing the same kind of stuff we're printing. We've tried scandal, tits on page one, even pictures of men and women together."

"Maybe we ought to hire a goat," said Richmond, cryptically.

The other men chuckled.

"Tits sell newspapers," said Maddox.

"And tits buy them too," Bradley answered. "Perhaps we're pitching our stories too high. I mean, who wants to read about a hijack when they can read how many pints of beer Oliver Reed can drink in an hour or who's who in the Hollywood Herpes stakes?"

"You're trivialising things Mr Bradley."

The words came from Dean.

He looked coldly at the news editor for a second then at Maddox, motioning for him to sit down.

"We deal in trivialities," said Bradley. "That's the job of a tabloid newspaper isn't it?" The sarcasm in his voice wasn't lost on the editor.

"I'll tell you what's missing from this paper," Dean said. "The incentive to buy it. The man on the street looks at *The Mercury* and all our rival papers, and wonders why he should buy our paper instead of the others. He needs an incentive."

"Like what?" Richmond wanted to know.

"Other papers offer millions of pounds in bingo prizes, right?" Dean began. "What we need is a competition with a difference. A prize that money can't buy."

"So you're telling me that the way to make this paper top again is with competitions?" Bradley said, aghast.

Dean nodded.

"What kind of prize did you have in mind, Frank?" Maddox wanted to know.

"We start with something simple then work our way

up to the big one. I said a prize that money can't buy. What about life itself."

The other men in the room looked puzzled.

"Our first competition will be to send the winner to Lourdes. We scour children's hospitals around the country, find a couple of kids who are dying, preferably from cancer because it's the most emotive subject, send them to Lourdes. They come back cured. *The Mercury* is then looked upon as both generous and caring." He smiled smugly and pressed his fingertips together, resting his chin on them as if in silent meditation.

"But how the hell can we be sure they'll come back cured?" Bradley wanted to know.

"Because they won't have the disease before they go. We pay a doctor to examine two kids and tell everyone that they're terminally ill then, when they return, we get an independent doctor to examine them and he can tell the waiting press and thousands of concerned readers that the little darlings are now completely cured." There was a note of scorn in Dean's voice which sounded almost obscene.

"But what's the competition? What's the attraction to the ordinary punter?" Bradley demanded.

"Whoever wins the competition gets a free trip to Lourdes followed by a week in Paris and £100,000 in prize money. They get to sample the pleasure of a holiday and the joy of seeing two dying children cured. It's one hell of an angle." The editor looked at his colleagues and smiled.

"That's obscene," said Richmond, quietly.

"You don't agree with the idea, Mr Richmond?" Dean said.

"What's next? Win your own kidney transplant?"

Dean raised his eyebrows. "Not a bad idea," he said, smiling.

"I want no part of this."

"Very well. Then leave," Dean said, flatly. "No one is stopping you. Go." He glared at the sports editor who looked around at his colleagues as if for some kind of support. None was forthcoming.

"The paper's in a pretty bad way, Bob," said Bradley. "We've got nothing to lose."

"Except our integrity," snapped Richmond. "Our self-respect."

"If you had either of those you wouldn't be working for a tabloid," Dean said. "We're in this business to sell papers and make profit. If you want integrity or self-respect go and work for the bloody Samaritans."

Silence descended over the room, as impenetrable as the cloud of cigarette smoke which filled it. It was finally broken by Dean.

"Then we're agreed. I want that announced in tomorrow's edition. The first of many competitions, the like of which have never been seen before." He smiled.

"I wonder what the other papers will make of it?" said Maddox.

"Well we'll never know what Roger Galloway thought of it will we? They found the poor sod dead at home last night. Heart attack apparently," Bradley observed.

"One less competitor," said Dean, quietly.

3.

As Bradley walked out of the editor's office a young woman, who he knew as Fran, came scuttling towards him clutching a piece of paper.

"Some guy called Baker called," she told him. "He wants you to 'phone him back. Something to do with Roger Galloway."

Bradley nodded, took the paper from her and headed for his desk. He jabbed out the digits on the 'phone and waited for the receiver to be picked up.

"Hello."

He recognised the morgue attendant's voice immediately. Baker had a pronounced Scottish accent which was almost impossible to understand when he became angry. However, now he was calm.

"Brian, it's Vic Bradley. What's this about Galloway?" asked the newsman.

"I was here when they brought him in last night," said Baker. "I've never seen anything like it before."

"I thought it was a heart attack," Bradley said.

"Like hell. They did the autopsy this morning. The poor bastard died of fright."

4.

The children were both girls. Beautiful children. Bradley couldn't remember their names offhand. Both were dying of brain tumours.

At least as far as the readers of *The Mercury* were concerned.

The winner of the trip to Lourdes was a man called Austin. He and his wife were flown out to the shrine along with a photographer who took pictures from every available angle of the two girls being blessed along with the other pitiful, despairing souls present at the place of healing. Those with no legs were pushed along in wheelchairs by weeping relatives, the feeble-minded were half-supported, half-carried. Screams of pain punctuated the blessings and the prayers. Then the girls were flown back to London, duly examined, and found to be cured.

The miracle was the lead story.

By the end of that week circulation figures for *The Mercury* had gone up by sixteen percent.

Edward Wickes read the story, skimming over the salient details with a mixture of disgust and anger. He finally threw the paper to one side and started his engine, guiding the car out into traffic. How much lower could *The Mercury* sink, he wondered? He disliked the fact that his own newspaper had to resort to petty games of chance to attract readers but this latest 'competition' launched by *The Mercury* was the limit.

What was even more annoying was the fact that it was working.

Wickes had a meeting with his managing editor the following morning to discuss what could be done to check the progress of the rival paper. But Wickes had always adhered to the principle that a paper was for news, not gossip or innuendo. If possible, he wanted to remain editor of a paper which still valued such old-fashioned things as morals and standards.

The car behind him seemed to be drawing rather close and Wickes winced as its headlights shone brightly in his rearview mirror. He shielded his eyes from the powerful glare and cursed the driver, trying to pull away from him.

The vehicle behind stayed within ten feet of him.

In the growing darkness and with the glare of the headlamps in his eyes, Wickes could not make out the car which he was now sure was following him, but he determined to lose it somehow.

He signalled left but turned right, narrowly missing a taxi which sounded its horn at him.

The other car followed.

Wickes murmured to himself and put his foot down, swerving in front of a lorry as he approached a set of traffic lights.

The car behind was forced to pull in at the tail of the juggernaut.

Wickes watched the lights, waiting for them to change to green, alternately glancing into his wing mirror for any sight of the other car. Perhaps he was wrong, perhaps it wasn't following. Was his imagination staring to get the better of him? The lights changed and he drove on, glancing back to see that the lorry still blocked the path of the other vehicle. He

swung his own car down a side street out of sight, swiftly flicking off the lights.

Watching in the rearview mirror he saw the other car drive past and he smiled triumphantly.

He was about to restart the engine when he felt the car shake slightly.

The movement came from the rear of the vehicle. From the boot.

He waited a moment then turned on the engine.

The car shook again.

Wickes muttered to himself, switched the engine off and climbed out, walking around to the rear of the car. He selected the appropriate key and inserted it into the lock on the boot.

He opened it.

5.

The ringing of the 'phone woke Bradley. He sat up quickly, groaning as his head began to pound. The luminous hands of the alarm clock glowed in the darkness.

3.06 am.

He scrambled for the 'phone and pressed the receiver to his ear, rubbing his eyes with his free hand.

"Bradley," he croaked.

"Vic, it's me. Baker. I'm at the morgue again."

Bradley blinked and this time his vision and his head seemed to clear.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"They just brought in the body of Edward Wickes. He's dead. Massive heart attack, just like Galloway. Wickes died of fright too."

Both were dying of brain tumours.

6.

"It's official," said Peter Maddox, holding up the computer printout. "We are now number one. Circulation figure is close to five million."

Frank Dean smiled knowingly.

"Top newspaper, and two of our main rivals are both dead too," said Bradley. "It seems everything is going our way."

Dean wasn't slow to catch the sarcasm in his voice.

"What are you trying to say, Bradley?"

"That it's convenient that the editors of our two main rivals have died within days of each other. died of fright I might add. Don't you find that a little unusual?" said the newsman.



"Perhaps they were overcome at our success," Dean chuckled. "And now, with this new competition, we will push our figures even higher. We've had miracle cures, thousands of pounds worth of prize money but they were nothing. Now we unveil the ultimate prize."

The other men looked on expectantly.

Dean smiled.

"What would you give to be granted immortality?" he said. "To win a competition where the prize is eternal life?"

Bradley snorted.

"You're crazy," he said. Dean didn't answer.

"How do you propose to do that? Immortality?" Bradley persisted. "The public might be gullible but they're not complete idiots."

"I want it announced in tomorrow's edition," said Dean, ignoring Bradley and looking at Maddox. Then the owner got up and walked out.

"Thanks for the support fellas," said Bradley, irritably as he headed for the door. He paused. "Come on then, how many of you go along with this idea? Eternal life? Do me a favour!"

"If it works who cares?" said Maddox. "I'm not arguing with him. I've got a wife and a mortgage to support. If he thinks he can pull it off let him try."

"You're as bloody stupid as he is," snapped Bradley and walked out. "Eternal life," he muttered. "Then what? Time travel? Win a day out at the Circus Maximus . . . Your very own special box next to the Emperor. Bring the whole family. Bet on the gladiators, laugh at the Christians, watch the slaves being torn apart by animals. A fun day out for the whole family courtesy of your *Marvelous Mercury*." He shook his head. "Jesus Christ."

Maybe that would be one to think about for the future.

Win your own crucifixion.

It beat the crap out of getting six numbers up on a bingo line. A bit painful maybe, but by God it was original.

Bradley left the office and headed for the pub. It took more than the usual three or four pints to make him forget the lunacy of the day, and by the time he decided to make his way home it was almost nine o'clock. Outside, rain fell and storm clouds were gathering, bloated and sodden. He ran to his car, covering his head with a copy of *The Mercury*.

The drive home took him less than thirty minutes. He dashed to his front door, fumbled for his key and let himself in.

A couple of the local free papers were lying on the mat. He scooped them up and wandered into the sitting room, flicking on the light as he did.

Frank Dean was sitting in the armchair closest to the fire.

"Jesus!" gasped Bradley, taking a step back.

"Welcome home, Bradley."

"What are you doing here? How did you get in?"

"That's not important. I wanted to speak to you about the prize. You seemed to doubt my sincerity."

"Eternal life is pushing credibility a bit far."

"Is it proof you want?"

Bradley looked puzzled.

Dean got slowly to his feet.

"I want to know what's going on," Bradley said, angrily. "I want to know what you really think about two of our main competitors dying within days of each other. And do you know how they died? They were frightened to death. Doesn't that interest you? Surely there's a story in that. We are in the business of stories aren't we? Even if we do make most of them up." He looked unfalteringly at Dean. "So, what's the trick with the immortality competition?"

"It's no trick, Bradley. Believe me," Dean smiled.

It was as his lips slid back that Bradley noticed the two abnormally long and pointed canine teeth which

protruded from his upper jaw.

"Immortality is no joke, I can assure you."

Bradley stood riveted to the spot, as if his shoes had been welded to the carpet.

Dean's features seemed to crack open, his skin peeling back like heat-blistered pain and, beneath the pale flesh there was a rubbery tissue covering his bones. Bones which looked as though they would tear through the skin. His fingernails began to grow, pushing through the cuticles, covering the normal nails until his hands resembled talons.

But it was the eyes which held Bradley immobilised.

The whites slowly coloured red until it seemed that the sockets were filled with boiling blood.

Dean opened his mouth, his teeth now impossibly long. Thick mucus dripped from them, some of it spilling down his chin.

"Don't mock what you don't understand, Bradley," he rasped. "When I say 'immortality', I know what I'm talking about."

A tendril of skin fell from Dean's face. He caught it in one clawed hand, looked at it for a moment then pushed it into his mouth.

Bradley felt sick and now he was also aware of a growing stench. A vile odour of decay. Of age.

"I'd include you in the prize of course," said Dean.

"One bite and you'd know immortality too but," he shrugged. "You know it's not open to employees of the paper. Too bad."

Bradley tried to back away as Dean advanced.

"Don't fight it. Galloway and Wickes tried to."

"You killed them?"

"They were weak. Their hearts. So sad," Dean smiled, his features splitting even wider until the flesh of his face hung like bloodied tentacles, scarcely covering the leathery skin beneath.

"One bite means immortality," he said. "Better than winning a car isn't it?" He chuckled. "I wonder who the lucky winner will be. I'll just have to wait and see. A shame you won't be here to share the celebrations."

Bradley dropped to his knees, the stench now almost suffocating him. He felt as if he were going to vomit.

Dean grabbed him by the throat, lifting him off the floor with one powerful hand.

"This would have made a good story," Dean said, smiling, "but then again. Who would ever believe it?"

They were weak. Their hearts. So sad.



HOW TO MAKE A MOVIE - Part One

TALES OF THE BUSY AUTEUR

The movie business is one of the most powerful industries in the modern world. It builds images, creates role-models and turns make-believe into reality. But how is it run? How do you put a film project together? And who makes the money? In the first of a four-part investigative series about the world of films, John Gilbert gives an overview of the creative process



hell had a kitchen it would look very much like the special effects lot at Pinewood Studios. Red, boiled limbs stick out from torn cardboard boxes, grey clay heads stand on scrubbed wood tables, monstrous pink masks hang from the wall and the floor is caked in dusty plaster as white as flour.

It's the perfect place to introduce a series about the movie-making business. Although the majority of horror and fantasy films are made in Los Angeles, USA, it's for special effects that Americans come to Britain. We're second-to-none in that department, and Pinewood, with its massive sound stages, is still the place to be for directors such as Stephen Spielberg – who has just completed *Who Shot Roger Rabbit* here – and Gary Kurtz – the *Star Wars* producer who has just finished a space adventure called *Slip Stream* in these hallowed premises.

But, in the beginning of every movie there is the money – the effects come in the middle of the project – and it's still the USA which controls most of that.

A movie can get off its butt in several, flukish, ways, but most originate with a writer whose agent or publisher thinks their new short story or novel has filmic possibilities. It's sent out to independent producers or major studios who are the decision-, and money-makers. In turn, they read the author's 'property' and decide whether to put an option on it or, in the case of a hot property, buy the movie rights.

If the option's bought, we're still a long way from getting the film made. An option, for which the writer is paid as little as £5 - 6,000 is a 'maybe' contract: 'maybe we'll make a film out of your book, but I wouldn't bank on it'. Later, if the book does well in the bestseller charts, the producer may 'take up' on the option and buy the rights, in which case you're moving but still aren't much closer to getting the movie made.

THE MONEY MOGULS

Those myths about the independent movie moguls are to some extent untrue. The bosses of major film studios may have money to flaunt but they're business men and don't usually go around with camera lenses bouncing against their pink t-shirts.

No, the image of the mogul comes mainly from independent producers who are not tied down to one particular studio and, as a result, rely on either a contract with a studio or a complex deal with a number of film production companies; who then go to the biggies, such as Rank, Warner Brothers, or Twentieth Century Fox, for distribution through cinemas.

Such deals are often fraught with monetary landmines and sometimes an unscrupulous distributor can take all rights to your product as well as all the money. If that happens you could end up with your option money, your advance rights money – usually amounting to little more than £60,000 – and a very deflated ego.

There's nothing nefarious about the production companies' ruthless ways of working contracts. If you're fool enough not to check the wording of an all-important document you're certainly not much of a businessman, in which case the film world – which is just another business community, after all – will show no pity.

WELCOME TO THE HOTHOUSE

Once the producer and business assistants have done all the financial donkeywork, it's time to start hiring production staff. At the start there are three main screen-credit jobs to be filled: director, scriptwriter, and casting director, with a fourth – production accountant – who is usually employed by the production company.

The production accountant works with the producer on the budget which will determine who they can hire for the lead roles, the amount of time they can take for the production schedule and the amount of money that can be spent on sets, costume, and location, not to forget visual and make-up effects. If a film's on a £1 - £3 million low-budget you can forget Lawrence Olivier (well, it may be a necromantic movie) for the starring role, a three-month filming schedule off the coast of Miami and a screen world full of monsters. Even when you're working with £18 million – on the set of the next *Superman* movie – you will still have to cut corners; artistic vision and reality rarely mix.

While the production budget is being fixed the producer and director may have asked the scriptwriter, or the original author, for a treatment of the novel. The treatment's little more than a synopsis of the plot, showing the way in which the script will move away from the novel and how the characters will develop. If satisfactory, it is soon followed by a story breakdown which takes each scene and develops it, though still in short-story format.

From the breakdown, the writer, if he hasn't been fired, produces a shooting script [see Part Two of this series] which is for the director's, rather than an actor's, benefit. It details, in a highly systematic manner, the types of camera shot/angle which will make up each scene – in terms of wide angle shot, close-up, or birds' eye. It is, however, ultimately the director's job to interpret the way in which a particular camera shot should be made and he even has the power to alter the way in which the camera views each scene.

FRANTIC

While the script's being prepared, the producer, with the help of the director, also has to devise a shooting schedule, a running order of scenes, special effects, and locations into which the cast must fit. The schedule can be anything from six weeks to two months with at least another month added for post production work such as special visual effects and editing.

Factors to consider in the schedule are that members of the



Even when you're working with £18 million, you will still have to cut corners



HOW TO MAKE A MOVIE - Part One

cast may have other commitments on certain days, some locations may only be available for a limited period and some special visual effects may be more complex than others. Members of the press also have to be accommodated with set visits and photo sessions. You're hardly going to shoot your most boring scenes on the day that Barry Norman comes a-visiting with his television cameras.

As you can see, it's unlikely that the movie will be shot in script sequence and that's why each scene is numbered and each shot indexed, often with a letter of the alphabet. Scene 53, for instance, may contain a close-up profile shot of Dracula which comes second in the running order. It might, therefore, be labelled 53.b, or 53.2.

The shooting schedule may be shaping up well, but while it's being put together, the casting director must also have a share of the producer's and director's time. Most casting directors work as freelancers for agencies. They not only have the phone numbers for the stars' agents they might need but the most successful also have an almost inborn talent at matching a part to a particular actor's face and personality.

Casting can, of course, happen almost haphazardly if the producer or director have a friend or relative who could fit a part. These acquaintances still have to read – auditioned – for the part, in front of the director and a camera, to make sure that all three creative forces can work together. If an actor can't work with a director you aren't going to have a film.

CAST OF THOUSANDS

As the main cast and shooting schedule are being put together, the production company is also hiring the hundreds of production people whose names whizz by on the post-film credits. They include assistant directors, director of photography, cameramen, sound technicians, designers, editors, propsmen, hairdressers, and special/visual effects teams – all of whom you will meet later in the series.

The managers of each department have their turns with the producer and director, showing plans for sets, costumes and special effects. In theory the director has creative control over all those aspects of film making but, unless you're someone like Ken Russell, who has a very singular vision or doesn't care about the production teams' egos, you're likely to go with most of their ideas. After all, you've already briefed them about the film's central concepts and if you don't like what

you see you are partly to blame.

Some aspects of fantasy film making require more attention than others. The special effects, for instance, may determine whether a production is over budget or runs over its production schedule. If, during initial screenings, the director doesn't like the effects, time can be wasted reshooting them.

ON SET

The shooting schedule can make actors' and actresses' lives hell. As the scenes are not in sequence they often have to play very different emotions within a short space of time.

For instance, one morning – which can start as early as six o'clock on set, and that's after you've had your make-up applied – you may have to do two scenes, one at a party the other a deathbed scene in hospital. Not only that, but most of those scenes were shot yesterday and all the director now requires are reaction shots.

During the first, which lasts all of three seconds, the actress may be asked to leer at the camera while dancing with a friend. That would then be linked to a shot of her steady boyfriend reacting – which was filmed yesterday because he was on that set while she was doing something else.

She could be asked to do that leer ten or 11 times until the director, director of photography and sound man are sure that they've got at least one piece of film they can use. Then she crosses to the other set ready to go into sad mode.

Further problems can pile up for the director if the producer decides to save time and shoot some scenes simultaneously. On those occasions you might have one group of actors doing a special effects sequence on one sound stage while another films another sequence out on location. This sort of time-saving can be costly but necessary if your lead is contracted for another job halfway through the filming schedule.

POST PRODUCTION

When shooting is finished it's time for the visual effects team and editors to get in on the action.

Today, directors are doing more and more visual effects during the main film schedule, straight to camera and on location using special lenses; explained later in the series. But still, the majority are added during post production. While make-up effects comprise prosthetic (add-on) limbs and animatronic models (which are animated using a stop-frame camera), the visual effects include strange lights, camera angles, size,

and even weight, illusions. All are added by manipulating the images on the film which are then set in order and cut by the editor.

The movie's editor is handed all the film and makes sure that each shot is put into a smooth running sequence. Getting a flow from one shot to another, one scene to another, without jarring the viewers' senses is an artform only learnt through long application.

The job is made more difficult because the editor has to work to a time limit the finished film must not exceed. Most movie times hover around the 90-minute mark because the average viewer's attention starts to flag after that – even though they might want to get their money's-worth. They can, however, afford to be a little over, especially if the movie is going in front of a ratings panel and is likely to be cut. That said, though, the ratings board might offer a rating with which the production company is not happy and the editor consequently get the movie back in order to cut some more.

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

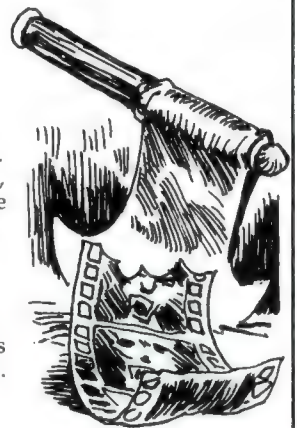
The British and US rating systems are very different from each other. In Britain you have to submit a film, which is intended for countrywide distribution, to the British Board of Film Classification (see interview on page 28.)

In the States, however, you can release a movie to independent cinemas without going to The Hays Office – the US version of the BBFC. If you want your movie to be a blockbuster, though, you will submit.

The two systems – British and US – also differ in approach. The British views a movie as a whole and attaches a rating on what is very much a value-judgment by the members of the Board. The American, however, analyses a picture and award points for bad language, violence or sex. It's a sliding scale so, for instance, you might score more points for a stabbing and five points for a decapitation. As you've guessed, the more points you score the bigger the rating prize you get.

Once you're over the censorship hurdle the distributor – be it Rank, Warners, New Line Cinema etc – can make a number of prints, usually around 200 to 300, and start targetting cinemas. If your film's a success in the first few weeks you can expect to make a sequel – and why not? If it flops you may find it more difficult to get a job, let alone financing another film. It's that tough, and not just in Tinsel Town.

Next Issue:
Tales of the Lonely Scriptwriter



Most movies times hover around the 90-minute mark, viewers' attention flags after that

Q: What do the following authors & artists have in common?

Douglas Adams Brian Aldiss Isaac Asimov

Iain Banks Clive Barker David Brin John Brosnan Jim Burns Ramsey Campbell
Angela Carter Joy Chant Simon Ian Childers Adrian Cole Edmund Cooper Louise Cooper
Richard Cowper Roger Dean Terrance Dicks Thomas M Disch Stephen Donaldson Harlan
Ellison Chris Foss David Gemmell David Gerrold William Gibson Charles L Grant
Harry Harrison Frank Herbert James Herbert Philip E High Robert Holdstock Shaun Hutson
Diana Wynne Jones Jeff Jones Peter Jones Mike Kaluta Colin Kapp Leigh Kennedy
Bernard King Nigel Kneale Harry Adam Knight Katherine Kurtz David Langford
Stephen Lawhead Anne McCaffrey Ian Marter Rodney Matthews Michael Moorcock
Chris Morgan Larry Niven Frederik Pohl Jerry Pournelle Terry Pratchett
Christopher Priest Robert Rankin Kim Stanley Robinson Michael Scott Rohan
Geoff Ryman Josephine Saxton Bob Shaw Robert Silverberg Brian Stableford
Theodore Sturgeon Patrick Tilley EC Tubb Lisa Tuttle Freda Warrington Ian Watson
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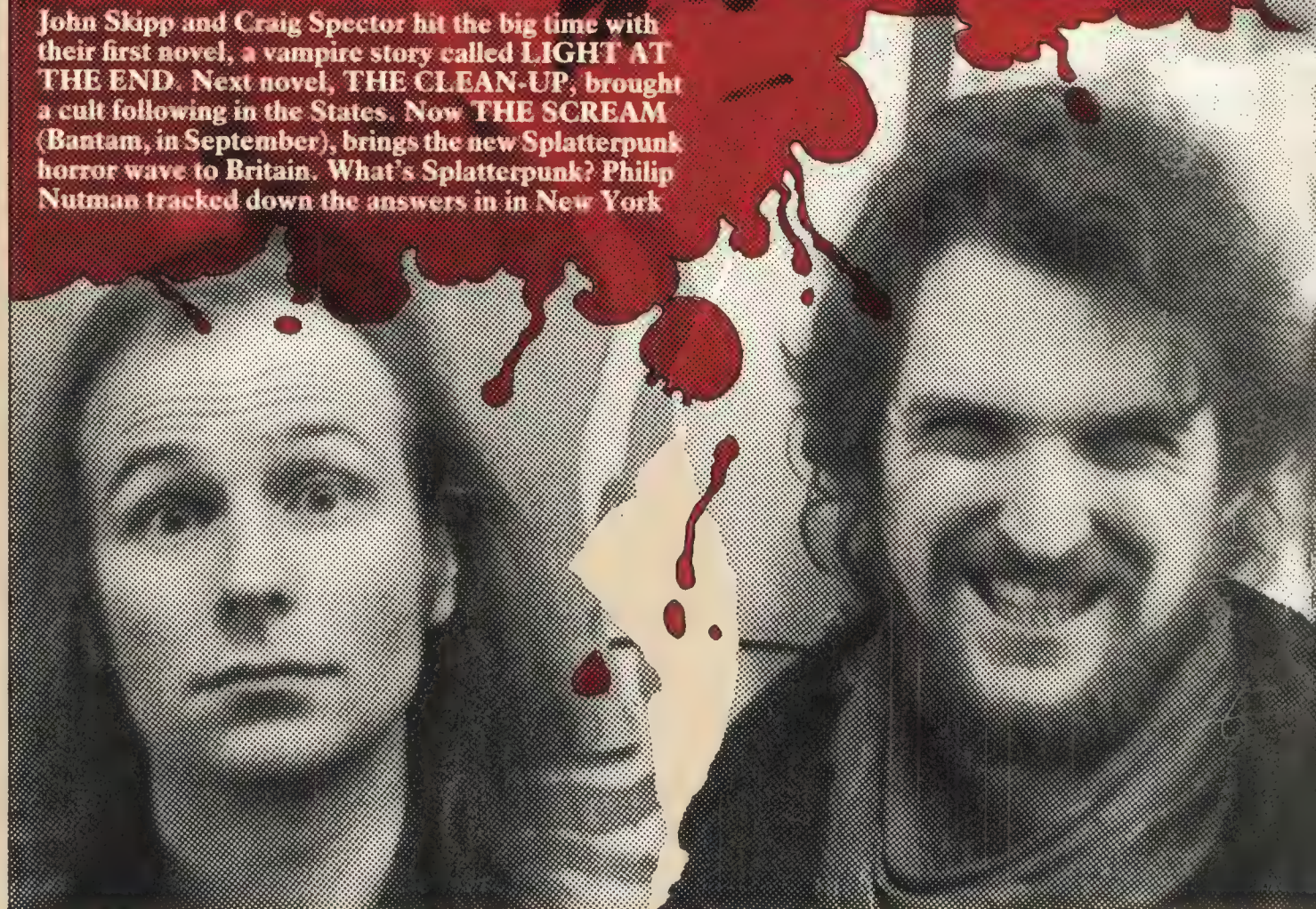
We Take

ACCESS, AMERICAN EXPRESS, VISA/BARCLAYCARD & DINERS

A: They've all had signing sessions with ANDROMEDA!

THE SCREAM: A TALE OF TWO SPLATTERPUNKS

John Skipp and Craig Spector hit the big time with their first novel, a vampire story called **LIGHT AT THE END**. Next novel, **THE CLEAN-UP**, brought a cult following in the States. Now **THE SCREAM** (Bantam, in September), brings the new Splatterpunk horror wave to Britain. What's Splatterpunk? Philip Nutman tracked down the answers in New York



Photograph courtesy of Craig Spector

**FADE INTO BLACK
SCREEN
NARRATOR**
(Voice over)

Perry's eyes were gone, but it didn't really matter. The old biblical quote had been set on its head. Perry had no eyes, yet he could still see. Let Jesus suck on *that* one for a while.

**FADE IN CREDITS,
INCANDESCENT BLOOD
RED ON DEEPEST BLACK**
Starring
**JOHN SKIPP and CRAIG
SPECTOR**

So starts *The Scream*, the latest novel of high voltage horror from John Skipp and Craig Spector.

If you ask the annoying question, "Who?", go to the back of the class, because you obviously

haven't been paying attention to what's been going on in the genre over the last couple of years.

The times they are changing. And so too is the type of fiction to which this magazine is devoted. Each generation gets the fiction it deserves, and sometimes it gets what it needs. Of late horror has gained a degree of mainstream respectability from the like of King, Straub, Barker, Campbell, and Grant, which is all well and good. But horror fiction is confrontational by nature and the cutting edge had appeared to be losing some of its sharpness.

Then came Skipp and Spector, psychic terrorists who want to give readers' perceptions a kick up their backside, want to strap you into an emotional rollercoaster and let off the brakes when you least expect it.

Call them young turks with an attitude.

Call them Splatterpunks if you dare.

Call 'em what you will. They're here, they're now. They're in *your* face, and it's *your* head they want . . .

PART ONE: THE LIGHT AT THE END

In 1986 Bantam books published a gutsy vampire novel called *The Light At The End*. It was about a punk vampire called Rudy Pasko causing havoc on the New York subway system and the ragtag group of Manhattan misfits who set out to thwart his murderous rampage.

At first glance it looked like just another trashy terror book. But it sure didn't read like one. It had a style all of its own and a co-authored voice that refused to speak politely; it shouted, and the

**"Splatterpunk
is an angle of
attack, a way
of life, and just
a phase we're
going
through"**

prose, though often overwrought, was never boring, never safe. It was gory, it was violent, sometimes it was downright painful. But it had heart and soul and characters for whom you could care. It got some good reviews, it got some bad. But ultimately, it sold.

Suddenly John Skipp and Craig Spector were hot.

The Light At The End was a first novel, its writers young, ambitious, intelligent, and roaring to go. Consequently, they became the axis point of a small band of new writers who have been dubbed 'Splatterpunks' because they dare to push the parameters further than ever before. Neither have a problem with the label, and they know it can't hurt them in terms of a media profile as the media loves to label people as commodities, yet being Splatterpunks is not the be all and end all of their talents as writers.

Skipp and Spector are the centrepiece of this new breed of hardcore horror scribes and their blood brother in amped-up fiction is David J Schow, author of *The Outer Limits Companion*, World Fantasy Award winner for his short fiction, and now a fellow novelist with the publication of *The Kill Riff*, his particular slant on the Heavy Metal horror story – available in hardcover from Tor Books in the US, and soon to be available in Britain from MacDonald. These guys make up the Power Trio of high velocity, no-holds-barred storytelling that rides the Splatterpunk label.

Outside the immediate Splatterpunk family are Ray Garton – *Darklings*, *Live Girls* – Joe R Lansdale – *Dead In The West*, *The Nightrunners* – and Richard Christian Matheson, screenwriter extraordinaire, short storyteller with style, and son of the great Richard Matheson. Clive Barker is the cousin with the wild imagination who mutters 'give me B-movies, or give me death!' with tongue firmly in cheek and a serious glint in his eyes whilst he devours philosophical works, writes lean, blood-soaked prose, and makes movies. Clive, of course, needs no introduction, and soon you'll know the other names just as well.

'Splatterpunk is an angle of attack, a way of life, and just a phase we're going through,' states Skipp.

Loved by a majority of the reading public, reviled by others, and criticised by certain other horror writers for their tough, unrelenting stance, Splatterpunk spells controversy, confrontationalism. but these boys are not goremongers just for the hell of it, they care about their fiction, their loved ones, and The

Big Issues of Life, the Universe and Everything.

It all comes down to the question of personal responsibility.

'Basically, when you look at things hard enough you start to see what your options are,' adds Skipp, 'and then it's up to you to exercise the ones that you feel most right for you. Part of the process is throwing out the bullshit and posing the tough questions to yourself and finding out where the answer is.

'When we write this hideous horror stuff we're throwing the reality of violence, the anatomy of violence, in the the reader's face, and we believe that helps equip the reader to make those hard choices. Clive [Barker] – has often said, 'I'll show you this stuff, then you'll look at it; are you still scared, or is it something else?'. What we're trying to do is raise the level of the dialogue. By pushing the limits of our awareness we are better equipped to make real choices.'

FLASHBACK: NEW YORK CITY 1982-84; YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, AND OTHER POINTS NORTH AND SOUTH

Skipp is the shorter of the two, the one with the thin, straggly hair which, when unwashed, and he's unshaven, gives him a slight resemblance to Uncle Creepy; Spector is the athletic looking one who wears skull earrings, a PLO scarf, and has the roguish appearance of a pirate-cum-gypsy. The former was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the latter Richmond, Virginia. They met at York Country Day School in Pennsylvania as teenagers and have stuck together through the lean times, the ups and downs. Both are musicians. they love their wives, their friends, the Garbage Pail Kids, Morton Downey Jr, life, movies, intellectual debate, beer, and can talk the hind legs off a donkey.

But the story really starts with a subway ride.

Spector was attending college in Boston, studying music. He and his girlfriend Lori – now his wife – were travelling by train to see a double bill of *Taxi Driver* and *The Deer Hunter* when the idea for *Light At The End* hit home.

Skipp, meanwhile, was living in Manhattan, sharing an apartment with four other refugees from York. He was the one who would sit in a corner all day pounding away at his typewriter. With two unpublished novels already under his belt, he had found a market for his short fiction in *Twilight Zone*

magazine, which had given him his first professional sale in 1982.

'My brain was in a 'what if?' mode,' explains Spector, 'and the question was, what if there was a vampire on the subway? since the Boston subway is too squeaky-clean for such a scenario I immediately transposed it to New York.'

When he returned to his apartment, Spector immediately phoned Skipp, despite the fact it was the early hours of the morning, and pitched the idea to him as a short story and with *Twilight Zone* in mind. Skipp responded favourably but was too busy to tackle the concept right away.

Months passed. Nothing happened. Spector, ever tenacious, kept pestering his friend. Finally, they sat down in New York one night to discuss the story and a novel was born.

Light At The End took 18 months to write after Spector moved to New York City. There they worked for the Educated and Dedicated Messenger Service, Spector roaming the mean streets on rollerskates while Skipp wore out numerous pairs of sneakers on foot. When finished, they sent the manuscript to Doubleday and Tor. Doubleday felt they could not market the book adequately and Tor suggested revisions the authors found uncomfortable to consider. Then they tried Bantam.

Being smart boys, these Splatterpunks, they pulled off a clever scam to get their manuscript into the hands of Lou Aronica, a young, highly successful editor at the company. 'I did a write-up on my messenger manifest,' clarifies Spector, 'then skated over to Bantam's offices at 666 Fifth Avenue, waltzed into the reception area and handed over the book to the receptionist, informing her Lou was expecting it, then shot down to the street.'

Aronica took the manuscript on his way out to lunch, not certain he was expecting it, began reading the book in the elevator, then nearly got hit by a cab as he exited the building since he was so wrapped up in the story.

The rest is history, a history that need not be recounted here.

JUMP CUT TO: JANUARY, 1987 – THE CLEANUP

the Cleanup, Skipp and Spector's second novel, turned out to be a tour-de-force supernatural vigilante story that grabs the reader on page one and refuses to let go. The narrative drags the reader kicking and screaming through a cold, neon-soaked concrete hell until the denouement, which, after

"To find something that works in the face of increasingly complex and mad times is really high on the agenda"

"It's ugly terrain, very scary stuff, and it doesn't surprise us some people freak out when they read it"

300-odd pages of knife-edge prose depicting heartbreak and redemption in the belly of the beast, comes as a sledgehammer blow to the emotional groin.

It's Dante's *Inferno* designed by HR Giger and photographed by Anto Corjbin; an inhospitable landscape cloaked in shadows, where the sunshine of hope fights against a black weight of alienation, psychosis, and persistent brutality.

If *Light At The End* was an overwrought book, *The Cleanup* is an older, more cynical sibling. Yet whatever its literary shortcomings, it delivers an emotional/visceral gut punch that is hard to beat.

And in doing so, the work seemed to secure Skipp and Spector the position as the Angry Young Men of Urban Horror.

NEW YORK CITY, JANUARY 1988

A biting cold wind rattles against the window panes of Craig Spector's apartment on Staten Island. Inside, it is warm, not just because the heaters are on full blast, but mainly due to the impassioned level of conversation that has been surging along for the past few hours.

Craig is sipping his fourth glass of iced tea; while John is nursing a steadily warming bottle of Beck's beer. In the background, Chris Young's soundtrack to *Hellraiser* plays softly on the CD.

For the past hour we have been discussing *The Scream*, their latest book, a slab of satanic storytelling that deals with a devil-worshipping Heavy Metal group who sacrifice groupies to a demonic creature that was given the opportunity to appear on this plane of existence during the napalm-kissed glory days of Vietnam.

The novel uses rock 'n' roll as the narrative hook on which the authors deal with censorship, right-wing fundamentalism, Tipper Gore's Parents Music Resource Centre movement, personal choice, sex, drugs, and the psychic wounds inflicted on the consciousness of the United States.

Above all, *The Scream* typifies the theme that rests in the heart of Skipp and Spector's fiction: personal responsibility.

'It's a big book,' says Skipp, 'and in some ways what we found ourselves tackling was the enormity of the Good vs Evil battle; it applies to the upcoming war in Central America and tries to get to grips with a world view on morality.'

'We have a good idea there will be an armed conflict in Central America within the next few years,' Spector opines. 'If you talk

to people who were in 'Nam and those who have been in Central America, they'll tell you Honduras in 1988 is a lot like Vietnam in 1963 . . .'

'And that's spooky,' adds Skipp.

'But beyond that, the big thing we're trying to talk about in the book is moral ambiguity and an attempt to redefine what morality really means. On the one hand there's the right-wing fundamentalists saying they've got the word of God sewn up in terms of what is right and what is wrong. At the same time their behaviour implies a massive contradiction in their own logic schemes. I think our task as a species is to work out a moral ground that's solid and consistent with people's real lives. That involves taking apart the old systems very meticulously to find out what works and what's horse flop.'

'To find something that works in the face of increasingly complex and mad times is really high on the agenda,' Spector adds.

As musicians, the dramatic harpoon of setting up opposing rock bands as protagonist/antagonists of the story made perfect sense.

'It was logical to start with rock 'n' roll, which is our tribal music, and then see who it is coming under fire from, then analyse the motives of those censorship-obsessed people. There's a battle for people's minds that is constantly being waged through the media which concerns us a lot,' pitches Skipp.

One of the main criticisms of their novels is their presentation of violence which, they concede, is highly – some would say excessively – realistic.

Skipp picks up the argument: 'The idea is, the reader picks up the book and . . . you didn't know it was going to get this bad, go this far. A lot of readers do feel bushwhacked by that, particularly in sequences like the main rape in *The Cleanup*. That scene's yanked more people's chains than any other scene we've written. It punches a major nerve.'

'We're dealing with different subjects, we're attempting to deal with sexual violence, the nature and ramifications of real flesh and blood violence. It's ugly terrain, very scary stuff, and it doesn't surprise us some people freak out when they read it, but there is a readership for it. A lot of people are looking for someone to deal with this stuff in a straightforward fashion,' he emphasises, 'to go all the way, while retaining a strong sense of humanity. But a lot of people think that you can't, or shouldn't do this, that because we write it we must be inhuman monsters. The big bone

of contention thrown at us by our critics is that we have no moral compass, which is bullshit.'

'But then we are confrontational writers,' Spector says. 'Certainly the stuff that has earned us the epithet Splatpunks is confrontational. That, though, is not the entire body of our work; our short stories are somewhat different.'

'Absolutely,' enthuses Skipp with a passionate expression on his face. 'When *Deadlines*, our next novel comes out in 1989, it's going to be interesting to see what reaction it gets as it qualifies as a 'quiet' horror novel. This is going to be fun because over the coming months a whole bunch of articles about how we're Splatpunks, how we're loud and threatening, will be appearing en masse.'

'If you want to quantify it,' says Spector, 'then Splatpunk is what happens when we push our own limits to the absolute maximum, to the red line. As a style it's gross, usually extreme, and always visceral. We want to shock complacency, to attack neutral reactions. Ultimately, we want to move people.'

Another criticism thrown at the dynamic duo is that their writing is too cinematic and contains too



much surface flash, the stylistic touches detracting from what they are trying to get to grips with on a subtextual level.

Spector again: 'Writers of our particular wave of the post-baby-boom generation grew up with the multimedia as a frame of reference to a large degree 'cause culture, especially at this stage in the 20th century, cannibalises itself. We grew up using film, TV, comics, and music as reference points that



now, in writing fiction, we employ . . .
 . . . as a matter of course,' finishes Skipp.

Not only do the premier Splatterpunk write this amped-up, MTV-style horror fiction, they also compose soundtracks to go with the books. Two demo tapes, for *Light At The End* and *The Cleanup* are ready to be unleashed on the ears of unsuspecting record company executives. Both display imagination, passion, and a high degree of professionalism that is sadly lacking in most chart music. And above all else, it's good, commercial material.

Mention of music makes Spector animated: 'In terms of interface between media we have a lot of ideas. Our ultimate dream gig would be the book we do a screenplay of, then direct, do the music for, and act in . . .'

'Then do the video that ties in the music, the movie, the book,' shoots Skipp.

'Basically, an old joke of mine is that I've always wanted to be the Woody Allen of horror,' he continues. 'You know, write and direct and star in it, do the music, and have my character be horribly killed, then spend the rest of the movie talking about death is even

their commitment to try and raise the level of dialogue, to encourage people to try new options, consider different possibilities, not just in terms of horror fiction or the media mulch meltdown, but specifically in terms of our interpersonal relationships, the ways in which we view ourselves and our environment. As Spector puts it, 'The secret is not to try and kick down the walls, but to walk through them.'

'It's exciting,' enthuses Skipp, 'right now there's a bunch of very creative people around, folks like Clive, Dave Schow, Richard Christian Matheson, and a number of others, whose work seems to reflect tangible differences in the consciousness of the horror story. That seems to indicate the field's going through a watershed period.'

'I'm waiting to see the next wave,' admits Spector. 'Those people who've read Robert Bloch, Richard Matheson, Stephen King, then discovered Clive and our books, to see how the exponential progression of imagination develops. One way or another, we all end up helping each other out.'

'The older writers paved the way for us to do what we're currently attempting,' he continues, 'and undoubtedly we're paving the way for the next generation who, hopefully, will keep us from getting creaky. The new blood prevents the old from getting tired.'

The new trend that is developing, according to critic and author, Douglas E Winter, is one he describes as 'antihorror', fiction that does not conform to the typical strictures of the genre. Antihorror is transformational fiction, imaginative writing that turns the conventions of the genre, not on their head, but on their side. It is not a case of fighting the supernatural/extra terrestrial/psychological intrusion and returning to the status quo, it is a desire to open up new possibilities, ask ourselves new questions about what horror fiction is and why we read it.

Though Winter does not believe the recent batch of Splatterpunk novels qualify as antihorror, or are particularly radical – *The Scream*, he says, 'is a rather conservative novel, anyway you look at it', a comment I tend to agree with, but the book's conventionality suits its theme – he does concede that the writers show great promise for the future, especially Skipp and Spector.

The substance of antihorror, the bones behind the flesh, is the horror of our lives, a theme Skipp and Spector frequently touch upon even if the dialogue is unfinished.

'All this hideous stuff's

imprinted on our lives,' Spector reasons. 'One of the things that really made an imprint on my life was, aside from growing up with wonderful things like a full-colour Vietnam on TV – I mean, watching that stuff while eating dinner at the age of six is weird enough – and Kennedy's assassination, was when I realised I would have died in a concentration camp if I'd been born a few decades earlier.'

'The scariest thing is the realisation that the guys who do this shit, be it in Nazi Germany, or secret police in South America, etc, look like certified accountants; they're just pushing numbers around, obeying orders. That's the true face of modern horror that is our lives.'

'The nightmare has always existed,' Skipp states, 'it's just changed its shape.'

EPILOGUE: 1989 – DEADLINES, THE BOOK OF THE DEAD, THE LIGHT AT THE END ON TELEVISION

As Douglas E Winter concedes, Skipp and Spector are growing as writers. Not only that, their media profile is growing as big as Clive Barker's.

But first, the fiction.

Their next novel, *Deadlines*, appears – at least on the strength of the work-in-progress extracts they kindly provided during the writing of this piece – to be the fulfillment of that promise and should set a high tide mark for their fiction.

Before that is released, however, we'll have *The Book Of The Dead*, an anthology of zombie stories they have edited, which includes contributions from Stephen King, Ramsey Campbell, David Schow, Douglas E Winter, and Robert R McCammon.

Then there is the proposed *Light At The End* television movie.

'The movie rights to the book were snapped up a couple of years ago,' he recalls, 'and a couple of script adaptations were written. First one company had an option, then another. Finally, CBS made a bid for it, specifically as a Movie of the Week, which was a disconcerting idea at first, but hey, *Salem's Lot* didn't do Stephen King's reputation any harm.'

'Just so long as they don't cast David Soul as Rudy,' quips Spector. Then, in unison: 'Ooo, scary!'

Cue laughter
 FADE TO BLACK
 ROLL END CREDITS
 Thanks to: SKIPP/SPECTOR,
 TAPPAN KING,
 DOUGLAS E WINTER,
 TONY TIMPONE, J PETER
 ORR



worse than he thought it was going to be and he still doesn't know what it all means.'

'Yeah,' agrees Spector, 'but he gets to make love to lots of beautiful women . . .'

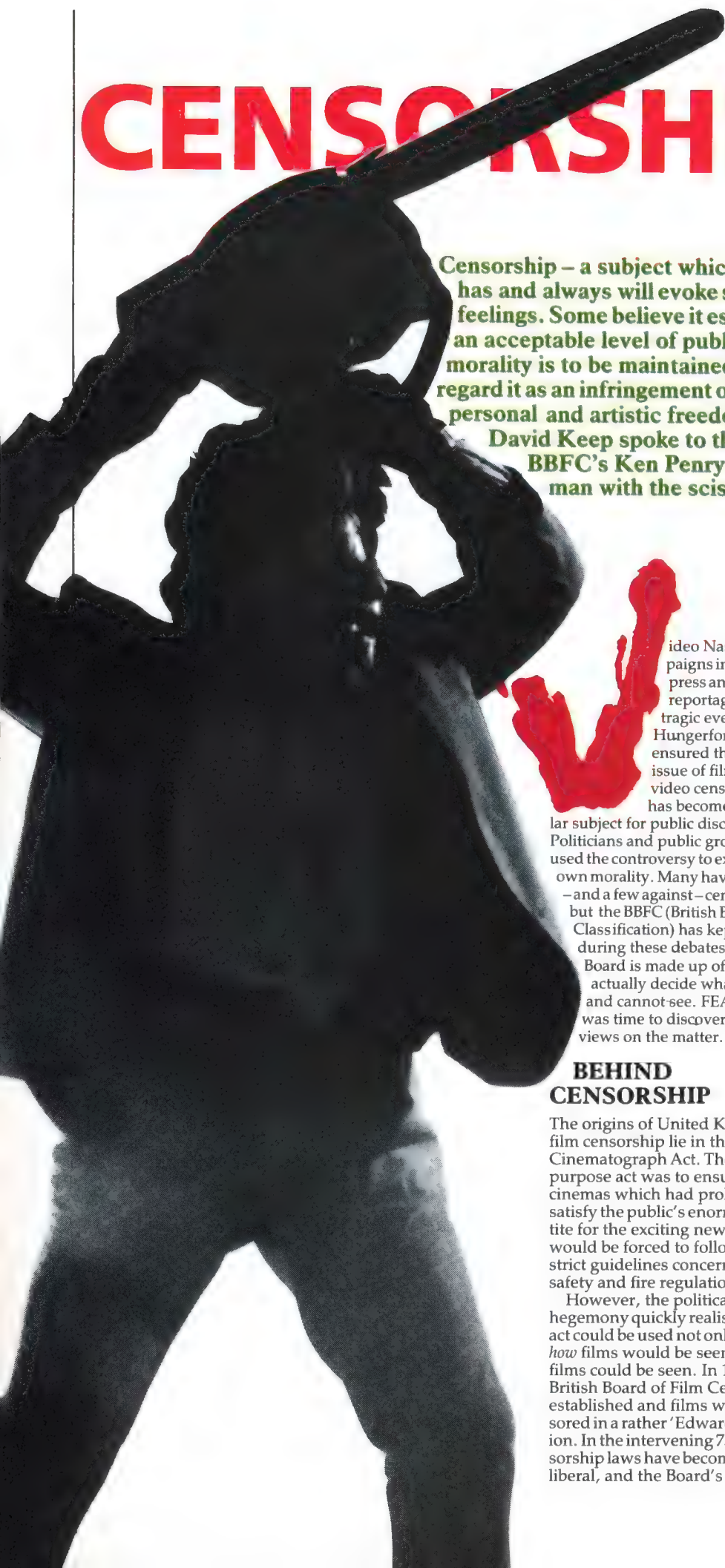
' . . . And crack lots of jokes about masturbation,' Skipp concludes.

The Splatterpunk's answer to Abbot and Costello fall apart on the sofa.

Talking to Skipp and Spector one quickly gets a genuine sense of

"Our ultimate dream gig would be the book we do a screenplay of, then direct, do the music for, and act in . . ."





CENSORSHIP OR C

Censorship – a subject which always has and always will evoke strong feelings. Some believe it essential if an acceptable level of public morality is to be maintained, others regard it as an infringement of personal and artistic freedom.

David Keep spoke to the BBFC's Ken Penry – the man with the scissors.

Video Nasty campaigns in the tabloid press and the biased reportage of the tragic events in Hungerford have ensured that the issue of film and video censorship has become a popular subject for public discussion. Politicians and public groups have used the controversy to express their own morality. Many have spoken for – and a few against – censorship, but the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) has kept quiet during these debates. Yet the Board is made up of people who actually decide what we can and cannot see. FEAR decided it was time to discover the Board's views on the matter.

BEHIND CENSORSHIP

The origins of United Kingdom film censorship lie in the 1909 Cinematograph Act. The act's main purpose was to ensure that cinemas which had proliferated to satisfy the public's enormous appetite for the exciting new media would be forced to follow a set of strict guidelines concerning public safety and fire regulations.

However, the political hegemony quickly realised that the act could be used not only to restrict how films would be seen but what films could be seen. In 1913 the British Board of Film Censors was established and films were censored in a rather 'Edwardian' fashion. In the intervening 75 years censorship laws have become far more liberal, and the Board's name has

been changed from the British Board of Film Censors to the British Board of Film Classification. There's a deal of difference in the words 'censor' and 'classify', but is this name change significant or merely cosmetic?

A TRIP TO SOHO

Having never visited the BBFC's offices in London's Soho Square, I had no idea what to expect, but imagination dictated dark, imposing rooms inhabited by middle-aged, blue-rinsed ladies of narrow views. The offices are, in fact, bright, spacious and the ladies are young, attractive and very friendly. I apologised for arriving 20 minutes late but the receptionist, rather than giving me the cold stern response I had expected, smiled and said, 'Don't worry, we're very casual about that sort of thing around here.'

I was to talk to the Deputy Director of the BBFC and – as I must confess that my attitude to authority and persons who hold it can only be described as iconoclastic – I was rather nervous about meeting a man whose business card announced him as Wing Commander KR Penry RAF Rtd.

However, Ken Penry is further proof that it is very foolish to approach the BBFC with any preconceptions. Penry is a pleasant and unassuming gentleman who looks a little like John Houseman, the actor whose films include *The Frog*. Although he requested of me not to tape the interview, Penry answered all my questions with candour and I found some of his answers surprising and reassuring.

I started by asking whether there is a need for censorship.

'The obvious answer is that the country demands it,' Penry replied, 'not the British Board of Film Classification. As Deputy Director I believe in classification rather than censorship.'

The answer clearly implied that the BBFC does not exist to prevent adults from seeing what they wish to, within reason, but to keep unsuitable material away from children. But if this is the case, why can people in London see *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and people in Brighton, less than 50 miles away, are unable to see *Monty Python's Life Of Brian*?

'With film we are non-statutory. We really just give an advisory guide for category. The statutory bodies are the licensing authorities. They have the right to change categories and set up their own boards, but for all practical pur-



LASSIFICATION?

poses they rely on the Board. Under the 1984 Video Recording Act, with video we are the statutory body, there is nobody beyond us.'

This is not to say that the Board considers itself to be an autonomous body; as Penry explained, there is an appeal board to which distributors can go if they feel their videos have been unfairly treated. Since the Video Recording Act was passed on September 1 1985, only four cases have gone before the appeal board (all involving 'adult films') of which two found in favour of the BBFC's decision and two found against. Additionally there is the Video Consultative Council, which consists of experts in fields such as psychology, whose opinions can be of great use to the Board.

CRONENBERG CONCESSION

As the conversation had turned to the role of outsiders being used by the Board, I asked if they were at all influenced by bodies such as Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association.

'As such, no, but we always listen. We watch and we listen. We are a sensitive body.'

How sensitive? I wondered. Although the horror genre seems to have come under attack in recent years, it would appear that the Board's loose guidelines concerning what is and isn't acceptable shouldn't really affect horror movies. The words 'fuck' and 'cunt' aren't allowed in films with a certificate of less than 15 and the main areas of violence which worry the Board are those involving easily copied crimes or involving weapons such as chain-sticks. However, the Board does believe horror can be as obscene as pornography. Canibalism is cut back because, it appears, that under the Obscene Publications Act films featuring canibalism could be prosecuted.

Penry used a wonderful phrase – 'The Cronenberg Concession' – to describe films like *The Fly*, *Hellraiser* and *Prince Of Darkness*, whose visceral elements are allowed because of the films' quality and the film makers' intent. It is worth noting that all three were released uncut for the cinema, that *The Fly* was released uncut for video and *Hellraiser* only received minimal cuts for video release. Indeed, Penry thinks that 'Cronenberg is very good'.

Material not allowed is that which features, in Penry's words, 'overkill'. It is acceptable to show

someone being stabbed but not to show 'the knife being twisted and guts spilling out. Over the top is the best way to describe it, particularly in a film of little merit'.

Another area which worries the Board is sexual degradation. Penry recalled a film submitted by the Cannon Group titled *Psycho Girls* in which a group of people are kidnapped and killed in a variety of sadistic ways. One woman is stripped, placed in a bath and electrocuted. Each time the power was turned on her naked body rose from the bath. (I was pleased to hear that this film was not passed. On a personal level I would like to state that this is one area in which I feel there should be censorship. With *Hellraiser* and *Videodrome* Barker and Cronenberg were able to explore the dark side of sexuality without turning their films into degenerate pornography).

Videodrome, ironically, is one film which was cut on video. Although the Video Nasty campaign featured heavily in *Tabloid Nasty Daily Mail*, it actually started when a *Sunday Times* writer saw *Nightmare Of A Damaged Brain*. It seems the lucid title and even more lucid cover were too subtle for him to realise what the film would be like – he was rather upset by what he saw.

As this campaign had stirred up the issue of censorship, I asked Penry how the Board differentiated between cinema and video releases. He summed up the situation up by quoting a line from the Video Recording Act that videos have an 'additional criteria as they are viewed in the home'. The Board faces a problem in cutting films for video release in that they must remove 'over the top' material without reducing the film to a juvenile level.

Another newspaper campaign concerned *A Nightmare On Elm Street III: Dream Warriors*. Alexander Walker in the *London Evening Standard* claimed that the film was responsible for a series of teenage suicides in America. Though it was proven most of the suicide victims had not actually seen the film, Fleet Street tried stopping it reaching these shores by publishing a series of hysterical articles. How did the Board cope with this situation?

'We brought in the Samaritans and psychiatrists and, because the suicides were induced by Freddy, we passed it uncut.'

Freddy's razor gloves, however, did concern Penry, but after much discussion it was decided that they would be a little hard for the average person to construct.

Not the first time the Board has

asked for outside advice, the RSPCA are consulted, for instance, when it appears that animals are being maltreated, or New Scotland Yard when they want to check if a crime committed in a film is easily copied. In Penry's own words the Board tries to do a 'good citizen's job'.

REDUCING VALUE

So, *A Nightmare On Elm Street III* was fairly treated; but what about the long-awaited *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II*? I asked Penry about rumours suggesting the Board wished to cut over 20 minutes before allowing its release. He denied them and said the Board is waiting to see a softer version of the film, which is supposed to exist in America, and added: 'The version we have seen is way over the top.' It is not that the sequel had the grim tension of the first film that is causing the trouble but the individual scenes, the 'specifics of the killings' are worse. However, no actual cut-list of sequences to be removed exists. Penry took this as chance to explain: 'We don't like to reduce to the viewer the value of what they are going to see as a result of cuts.'

For my penultimate question I asked how censorship is changing and how he thinks it will continue to change. The Board's attitude toward sex is growing more liberal, slowly, and, although taking a stricter line with violent actions, they are willing to consider each scene individually and pass a scene 'if the film justifies it'. The area Penry believes will be most troublesome is satellite television which, by its very nature, is a medium difficult to regulate.

I felt obliged to end the interview by asking the \$64,000 question: If violent films can turn innocent viewers into psychopaths, why haven't the members of the Board gone crazy through being exposed to so much uncensored material?

Rather than angered or resentful, the question amused Penry – it has been asked before. He showed me a book containing reports he had written while actually watching films; one occupied 12 sides of A4 paper. 'There's a certain professionalism, you are more distanced,' he explained, but added, 'emotionally, we are still vulnerable.'

Penry's final comment seemed to sum up his philosophy on the matter of censorship: 'I think that most people have a built-in thermostat which allows them to decide what they want to see and how much they can.'

DAVE KEEP began his writing career by contributing to *The Denton Dossier*, a renowned literary journal, and *Starburst*. He has written the first chapters for many great novels and hopes to one day write a second chapter. Dave's greatest achievement to date is the total destruction of his liver due to alcohol. He shares a flat with a cat and several large bills.

It might seem ironical that the BBFC's offices should be situated in Soho – London's main redlight district before the recent clean-up campaign – however its situation is not connected with the pornography of old Soho (nor is Soho's clean-up a result of the BBFC's proximity) but with the film distribution business which centres on Soho Square and nearby Wardour Street and Dean Street!



CENSORSHIP PETITION

FEAR readers make known their views

Censorship.

For some it holds the glories of a holy war, a cause for which they would fight to the bitter end until all violence, sex and horror is pried from the dark corners of fiction. Some of these self-appointed critics have honestly-held beliefs. They want a better world, free of disaster and horror. Who can blame them?

But there are also those who cynically manipulate the press against the fantasy and horror genres because they do not fit in with their personal credos. For these critics freedom is a secondary matter; they hold that human beings lack the sense to turn away from those things with which they don't

agree or which may upset them.

For the writers, directors, and programme makers, censorship has begun to represent fear. Fear that their work will be emasculated by Orwellian Star Chambers. Fear that they will be cast as little better than pervers, child molesters, and rapists of innocent minds. Fear that they will lose their artistic freedom.

As the editor of FEAR I must keep a responsible balance between censorship – for which there is a necessity in some cases – and the creative rights of fantasy/horror/science fiction writers and film makers. Unlike the national press, however, FEAR will aim to give both sides of the story, give artists the right of reply. None of them, in my

experience, are pervers. As you can see in FEAR's interviews, most of them see writing as a job – hard work – which contributes something to the human psyche, just as the romance and thriller writer does. None of them take it home with them or out on the streets.

The fantasist creates worlds, thrills, and horror entertainment, perhaps to parallel the fears of reality, to bring out those fears, make readers face them, perhaps laugh at them, and then feel as if they can get on with living in a dangerous world. They massage the muscles of fear, loosen their bonds.

The system of censorship which we have in Britain is,

with a few inadequacies, fair and honest. As you can see in the interview on the two previous pages, the British Board Of Film Classification is made up from reasonable people who, on the whole, do a good job. Why then, do we need more bodies – Star Chambers – which will take away the rights of film makers and viewers, and may soon turn to novels, and plays which have, until now, been left out of the censorship process.?



John Gilbert

A PUBLIC PETITION & QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE SUBJECT OF CENSORSHIP

In this first issue of **FEAR**, and those that follow, we're giving artists and censors the chance to air their views. But, this page is for your views. During the next couple of months we will publish the results of this censorship poll, print the names of those for and against in the

debate, and publicise the results to those in government.

Simply answer the questions below with which you agree, sign the form and return it to: **FEAR Censorship Poll**, Newsfield Ltd, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB.

1. I would support/would not support the application of censorship laws on books and plays.
2. I support/do not support the work of the British Board of Film Classification.
3. I would welcome/would not welcome a new regulating body to deal with violence on television, video, radio, cable and satellite networks.
4. I believe on TV there is too much:
☐ Sex
☐ Homosexuality
☐ Violence
☐ Political indoctrination
5. I believe in the cinema there is too much:
☐ Sex
☐ Homosexuality
☐ Violence
☐ Political indoctrination
6. I believe on radio there is too much:
☐ Sex
☐ Homosexuality
☐ Violence
☐ Political indoctrination
7. I believe in plays there is too much:
☐ Sex
☐ Homosexuality
☐ Violence
☐ Political indoctrination

8. I would like to see a new rating system for videos, the ratings for which would be:
.....
9. I would like to see a new rating system for film, the rating for which would be:
.....
10. I would like to see a rating system applied to network TV which would be:
.....
11. I would not like to see any further strengthening of the censorship laws relating to:
☐ cinema ☐ video ☐ network TV ☐ satellite TV
☐ cable TV ☐ plays ☐ radio

Name:

Address:

Signature:



BEETLEJUICE

Starring Michael Keaton, Alec Baldwin, Geena Davis. Director Tim Burton, Screenplay Michael McDowell and Warren Skaaren, Distributor Warner Brothers

Although it turned out to be this spring's top box-office attraction in America, *Beetlejuice*, methinks, is not going to be everyone's cup of ectoplasm on this side of the Atlantic.

Directed by **Tim Burton** (*Pee Wee's Big Adventure*), *Beetlejuice* is — like *Pee Wee* — the type of movie to provoke extreme responses in an audience. You'll either love this bizarre, frequently over-the-top, surreal, supernatural comedy-horror flick or hate it. This is dependent on whether or not you find Burton's unique style accessible or downright silly.

But before going any further I'll state I love the picture and this review is going to be overwhelmingly positive!

Written by horror novelist **Michael McDowell** (*Cold Moon Over Babylon*, the *Blackwater* books, etc) and veteran screenwriter **Warren Skaaren**, the story concerns Adam and Barbara Maitland (*Knots Landing*'s **Alec Baldwin** and *The Fly*'s **Geena Davis**), an amiable young rural couple who are deeply happy with both their marriage and their rambling Connecticut house. Actually, they are real stay-at-home folks who prefer to spend their vacation redecorating rather than travelling. But their holiday gets off to a bad start when their car crashes.

Returning home they discover they are dead and Heaven is apparently home. Not sure what to do (choirs of angels and the Pearly Gates are conspicuous by their absence), the Maitlands are disturbed to find once they step out the front door they are surrounded by a strange, *Dune*-like desert landscape replete with large, fearsome sandworms



which resemble a cross between a porpoise and something out of this world. To help them make the transition from one life to another they are provided with a manual for the recently deceased which proves to be more confusing than constructive ('This reads like stereo instructions', says Baldwin when Davis asks if he can understand it.)

Being dead and not knowing what to do about it turns out to be the least of their problems when the local estate-agent sells the property to the Deetz family, obnoxious nouveau riche New Yorkers who arrive with the attendant neurosiness of big-city living. Financier Charles (**Jeffrey Jones** from *Howard The Duck*) just wants a little peace and quiet, but his highly-strung, affected artist-wife Delia (**Catherine O'Hara**) has other ideas and begins turning the house into a new wave showcase for her weird sculptures with the encouragement of her fag, fashion-victim friend Otto (**Glenn Shadix**), while black-clad, depressed stepdaughter Lydia takes photographs of everything.

Naturally, the Maitlands are appalled by this state of affairs and, when their initial attempts at scaring away the new occupants backfire, finally flee through a dimensional doorway into the bureaucratic purgatory that is the Afterlife for those who have died of unnatural causes.

Here, they are informed by

their sassy, chain-smoking case worker (**Sylvia Sidney**) that they have been assigned to haunt their house for the next 125 years, a prospect that gives the harassed couple little comfort. Asking what they should do if all else fails, the case worker warns them about dealing with self-professed bio-exorcist Betelgeuse (*Beetlejuice* — played at full throttle by **Michael Keaton**) whose name means trouble whichever way you spell it.

When all else does indeed fail, *Beetlejuice* puts in an appearance that causes even more trouble.

Not all of the film works; it's only when the title character pops up that the proceedings get totally madcap, a situation which makes

the other scenes, though well handled, pale in comparison.

Keaton, who is probably best known here for *The Squeeze*, gives his best performance to date as the otherworldly exorcist, part-hysterical Barnum pitchman, general rascal and a total slob with a foul mouth who belches, gropes Geena Davis and causes trouble wherever he goes. Keaton's quirky mannerisms and lurching body language make *Beetlejuice* a character the like of which you've never seen before.

He may steal every scene he's in, but Keaton is ably supported by the rest of the cast. Baldwin and Davis are suitably endearing as the desperately domestic Maitlands, contrasting well with the frenetic Geetz family. Jeffrey Jones — best thing about the yawn-inducing *Howard The Duck* — gives a sympathetically jittery performance and Sylvia Sidney scores highly as the bad-tempered case worker who, in a nice sightgag, leaks smoke from the slash across her neck as she puffs away on endless cigarettes.

Visually, the best way to describe *Beetlejuice* is: Hieronymus Bosch meets Andrew Wyeth, a collision of styles that reflects Tim Burton's interest in combining the intellectual with a child's innate sense of silliness. **Thomas Ackerman**'s cinematography responds well to the challenge, giving the film a rich colour range that constantly startles the eye alongside Burton's weird ideas.

It's tempting to describe one or two of *Beetlejuice*'s hilarious setpieces but that would be unfair as its strength as a comedy comes through the element of surprise.

Suffice to say there has never been a film quite like this — and that quality alone should be recommendation enough, but I cannot stress too strongly how much of a mistake it would be to miss this movie.

Burton's next project is the new *Batman* film. Holy *Beetlejuice*! the Caped Crusader and Robin better watch out.

Philip Nutman



THE UNHOLY

Starring Ben Cross, Ned Beatty, Jill Carroll, Trevor Howard. Director Camilo Vila, Production by Vestron

Like *Bad Dreams*, *The Unholy* is another movie that starts off with a punchy, stylish opening but soon loses some of its focus. Unlike the former film, this one is proud to wear its horror colours on its chest, and is unashamedly gross in parts.

Fade into an atmospheric sequence during which a priest is seduced by a near-naked succubus who promptly proceeds to slash open his throat. This nifty little splatter set-piece then jumps to a glossy, neon-drenched title sequence which, we learn, is now three years later, and introduces Father John Michael (**Ben Cross**.)

He is on his way to prevent an attempted suicide, but before he reaches the hotel where an emotionally disturbed jumper is about to make a big splat on the sidewalk, he stops at a traffic accident where a victim suddenly lurches up from the stretcher to shout in his face, 'You're the one she wants!' before expiring.

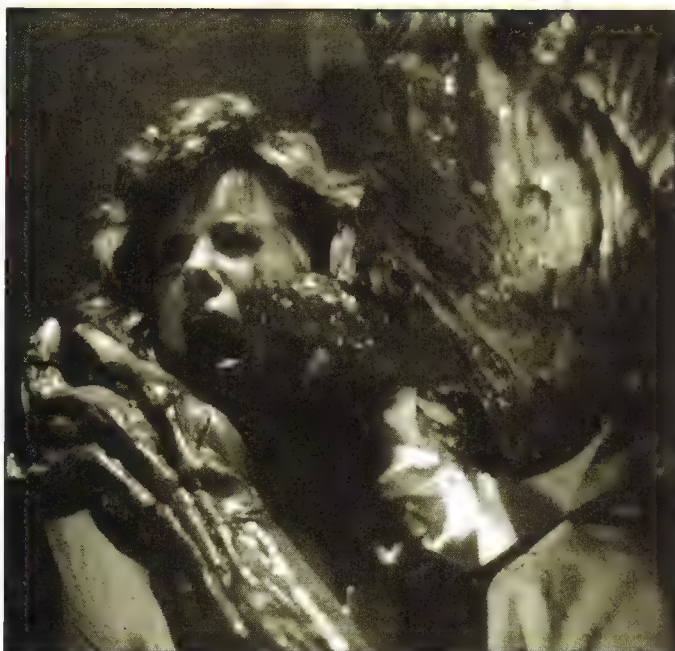
Confused, Michael continues to the hotel where he meets harassed police lieutenant Stern (**Ned Beatty**) and is briefed on the situation at hand.

Wham! The story delivers its second surprise within five minutes.

Father Michael's Good Samaritan act goes wrong, resulting in him taking a 17-storey-fall. Somehow he survives with only minor injuries. Hmm, this priest is certainly not your average man of the cloth, for sure, a quality recognised by Archbishop Mosely (**Hal Holbrook**) in his religious mode of acting, which is to say: identical to his performance in Carpenter's *The Fog*.)

As a result, Mosely appoints Father Michael to head a New Orleans parish, the one in fact at which the precredits murder took place. The slaying, it transpires, was not the first, and Mosely believes Michael is the right priest to settle the strange Satanic goings on once and for all. He's not the only one: Lieutenant Stern also realises there is something special about John Michael and offers his help.

Aided by the cop, the priest soon discovers that a lot more is going on in the neighbourhood than is first apparent. By checking through the previous priest's address book he learns of a connection with a local club called *The Threshold*, where blond punkesque manager Luke



(**William Russ**) stages mock-Satanic rituals as part of the stage show for his jaded, degenerate customers. Further to this is the link between teenage runaway Millie (**Jill Carroll**) and the two dead holy men.

From this point on the film's structure becomes increasingly diffuse as Father Michael witnesses poltergeist phenomena in Luke's bedroom when the club owner sleeps, and semi-subliminal recognitive flashes of what we recognise as the succubus when he talks to Millie. Then, to cap it all, his dog is ripped open and dumped on the altar, and he is attacked by an unseen entity during the night. Of this jumble of supernatural, post-*Exorcist* clichés, one image touches a nerve as Ben Cross awakes from an erotic nightmare to find his crotch covered in writhing serpents – only to find it's a dream within a dream. This is guaranteed to upset an audience, little old ladies and religious groups in particular. It gets my money as one of the best visual metaphors for conveying the Catholic church's attitude towards sexual temptation.

By this time I was having serious problems trying to figure out what exactly was supposed to be going on. Complex thrillers require careful structuring and *The Unholy* falls short of delivering

killer suspense at this point in the proceedings because the editing gets a little too choppy to sustain edge-of-the-seat tension. I may have missed several key lines of dialogue due to the infuriating activities of the noisy, moronic New York preview audience who treated every scene as if it was a *Porky's* flick.

What it all comes down to is the eternal fight between the Guy With The Horns and God, the former trying to corrupt the Omnipotent One's foot soldiers, the latter testing his disciples. *The Unholy* of the title is a senior demon whose job is to taint the souls of priests during Holy Week, a struggle that culminates on Easter Sunday when the designated soul either resists or is carted off to Hell. Since virgins and priests have a higher corruption value in Hell, the demon homes in on Millie, using her as a means of playing havoc with the holy men's sacred vows.

It must be said *The Unholy* is not a great horror picture, but after so many cop-out movies this one certainly kicks ass with grotesque imagery. Its uneven tone is due, apparently, to differing viewpoints between director **Camilo Vila** and distributors Vestron. Vila stated in a recent *Fangoria* interview that he didn't consider the film a horror movie (an attitude that crops up with

annoying frequency these days; if the **FEAR** editorial had £5 for every time some director said that, we'd all be living in luxury by now.) Vestron, wisely, know a fright film when they see one and invested more money in reshooting the ending.

Abandoning the original demon design, they employed British effects supervisor **Bob Keen** (of *Hellraiser* fame) and producers **Christopher Anderson** and **Gary Bettman**, who made *Waxworks* last year for the company, to handle the new material. As a result, the final conflict takes on a physical dimension that tries valiantly to pull the whole thing together.

Depending on how much suspension of disbelief you are prepared to give, the climax is either stupid in a gross-out manner, or really disturbing if you have any religious tendencies. Considering Bob Keen, who directed the reshoot, only had ten days to orchestrate nine minutes of slam-bang footage, the finale goes for broke and contains elements that our tender-hearted censors will undoubtedly have a problem dealing with (particularly the blasphemous inverted crucifixion/visceration and over-the-top blood-vomiting scenes.)

Technically speaking, *The Unholy* is stylishly shot, frequently atmospheric, generally well directed and edited, and the above average cast provide what is expected of them. Ben Cross is earnest, and fairly believable; Hal Holbrook, always a pleasure to watch, is clearly on autopilot, but lends credibility to his character; **Trevor Howard**, in his penultimate screen appearance, is by turns creepy and unnervingly amusing in his role as Father Silva – recalling John Carradine's blind priest in *The Sentinel*. But **Jill Carroll** and **William Russ** prove to be the most memorable as they give their characters an honest urgency, desperately innocent and seeking security in the former's case, wilfully contemptuous and sinister in the latter's.

I'll be the first to admit my personal critical standards for genre movies are very high and *The Unholy* did not satisfy them. Although I left the cinema grumbling about how another story with potential had been botched in places, certain images have stayed with me, which is something that rarely happens these days, so on that level the movie gets a plus rating at least.

If the majority of truly twisted, taboo scenes escape the BBFC's shears, the film should satisfy the demands of most horror fans, and it is guaranteed to invoke Barry Norman's typically smug, condescending attitude as far as the genre is concerned.

Philip Nutman



THE MONSTER SQUAD

Starring: Andre Gower, Robby Kiger, Stephen Macht, and Duncan Regehr. **Producer** Jonathan A Zimbert, **Director** Fred Dekker. **Cert** 15



Most of my short childhood was spent in awe and fear of Universal's monsters thrown at me through the television screen by the discerning controllers of BBC2. Dracula was my favourite, closely followed by suede-footed Wolfman, clod-hopping Frankenstein, and dusty mummy. The Gill-man got me later, but that's another story . . .

After such a monster rave you might have expected me to be thrilled by the prospect of *The Monster Squad*, a movie which contains all four of my heroes. Not so or, at least, not at first. When I was young I didn't know that Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney Jr were

actors. I didn't care whether Dracula was real. He just seemed real to me, and so it was with trepidation that I sat down to watch director Fred Dekker's attempt at a humorous homage. Would it remain faithful to my memories?

I needn't have worried. Dekker, who also co-wrote the script with Shane Black – make up your own jokes – has the Universal gruesome crewsome off pat from the first roll of thunder and flash of lightning. The story starts about 100 years ago at Dracula's Transylvanian retreat. He's stirred from his sleep amongst the bats when Van Helsing and his motley crew burst

in with a virgin and try to end his rain of blood. To succeed, Van Helsing must get the virgin to repeat an ancient rhyme, at which point a glowing amulet, stored within the castle should open the gateway to limbo sweep all evil into the void.

Things go wrong: instead, Van Helsing is swept into the void, and the injured Dracula, played with humour as well as insanity by **Duncan Regehr**, escapes but loses the all-important amulet. Cut to contemporary America where a group of small-town kids share an interest in horror.

Sean (**Andre Gower** *Highway To Heaven* and *Knight Rider*), the 14-year-old gang-leader, first spots Dracula's entrance and soon realises, after a local drunk turns into a werewolf and the waters of the local swamp are stirred up, that Mr Teeth is up to no good. In fact the vamp is after the amulet which, if used one hundred years from the date of Van Helsing's trip into the void, could destroy evil.

Drac wants to ensure that good fails to prevail and enlists his old cronies to help look for it. He also sends Frankenstein (**Tom Noonan**) to kill Sean and his friends, who've formed The Monster Squad to track down the evildoers. Fortunately Frankie falls for Sean's young sister and decides to help the kids – who include a teenage leather clad pedal-biker (**Ryan Lambert**) who doesn't 'know any virgins' and a Fat Kid (**Brent Chalem**) who looks as if he's just stepped out of *The Goonies* but is as much more

sympathetic than Chunk.

There are a lot of clichés in this film, but they're a help rather than hindrance because humour is all. The teen-movie gloss, the snide sexual innuendos, and the ruthless rip-offs from Stephen King et al, all appear fresh under Dekker's direction, which often assumes that you're a horror fan. I, for instance, was quickly drawn into the trap of counting the number of overt and covert references to Steve King in the movie, on t-shirts, posters and in the kids' conversations. The number of references quickly passed into double figures.

Unfortunately, the humour occasionally puts the movie's internal supernatural logic on shaky ground: it's reasonable to assume, for instance, that a Wolfman who's been hacked about can reassemble himself, then why is it so easy to deal with the mummy who gets no chance of a comeback?

The virgins have a problem as well: there must be hundreds of them in town but suddenly do you think Sean and his buddies can scrape even one out of a barrel? – or is this social comment?

I suspect that during the rush of the action you'll hardly notice the, admittedly, few plot problems. *The Monster Squad* is much too enjoyable to allow a few piffling false notes to get in the way. I particularly like Fred Dekker's courage in allowing the kids rather than the token adult – in the form of **Stephen Macht**, who plays Sean's police detective dad – save the day.

Dekker's involvement as director and screen writer is the central force within the movie, and he knows it. 'I know it sounds really cocky,' he says, 'but I told my agent that the script was only for sale with me attached as director.' Not that he didn't have a little help from co-writer Shane Black – who also wrote *Lethal Weapon*. 'Shane has an innate kind of genius at characterisation, and he really helped make the script better than I ever imagined



it could be.'

The monster effects were created by **Stan Winston** (*Aliens* and director of *Vengeance: The Demon* which hits Britain soon), which in this case mostly meant make-up for Tom Noonan as Frankenstein; and he's done well to translate the monster of the black-and-white screen into a fully-coloured good guy.

Visual effects, including the incredible vortex scene in which everything is sucked into a dark hole, were created by **Richard**

Edlund (*Poltergeist 2*, *Masters Of The Universe*, *Star Trek*). The vortex sequence was particularly memorable for Andre Gower as Sean: 'The most challenging thing I had to do was the vortex scene. We had something like 15 wind fans going and stop signs, styrofoam bricks and debris, bushes and leaves all going about 100 miles an hour as they're sucked into this hole in the earth. I was suspended on wire in a harness, hanging onto my friends, flying into the vortex.'

The Monster Squad is a refreshing movie, unashamed in its manipulation of clichés. It has heart, will appeal to anyone who's ever watched a black-and-white monster B-movie and will give the new generation of kids the opportunity to see the ol' guys at work. Some may say that it ridicules a serious piece of movie history. I say 'garbage', let's have more of this fun . . .

John Gilbert

(*Freddy's Revenge*) many opportunities to film fast-paced car chases, and sets up a forward momentum that spins out Bob Hunt's sparse script. All of this is well-shot by **Jacques Haitkin**, who proves he is versatile with a camera, be it adeptly handling spectacular action sequences or atmospheric chiller material (Haitkin lensed the first *Nightmare On Elm Street*.) Editor **Michael Knue** does a slick, classic Hollywood job with footage that is frequently startling and never dull.

The only thing that can kill the alien is a piece of hi-tech hardware owned by Gallagher which resembles a prop ray gun from the old *Flash Gordon* serials, a nod in the direction of *The Hidden*'s Fifties B-movie creature feature origins. Gallagher pulls out this piece of space junk when he and Beck attempt to stop the alien from escaping from the body of a glamorous stripper, a move that finally convinces the cop that Gallagher is not really who he is, consequently having the bogus Fed arrested. By now it comes as no surprise to find that Gallagher is also inhabited by an alien life form, one that has been sent to Earth to eradicate the renegade insect which had killed his family on another planet.

As the movie races into its final third, events escalate rapidly. The body-hopping thing, skips from a human into a dog, then a senator and two policemen, a series of personality transfers which involves the destruction of a police station and leads to a tense conclusion at a political meeting.

The Hidden is one of those films where it's a good idea to leave your brains in the cinema lobby. Its intention is purely to entertain as swiftly as possible without giving the audience the breathing space to consider the gaps in its narrative logic, though no doubt there is at least one French critic who has written a 30,000-word essay on its socio-political examination of personality disorders in consumerist America. Jack Shoulder's direction displays a sly wit that was not evident in *Freddy's Revenge*, and his skillful use of cinematography reflects his experience as an editor. The acting is slightly above average with Nouri and MacLachlan contrasting nicely, the latter using his ability to convey quirky innocence à la his performance in *Blue Velvet*. Kevin Yagher's insectoid aliens are humorously grotesque, particularly during the mouth-to-mouth scenes when Shoulder makes fine use of **Jeffrey Haboush** and **Greg Russell**'s belching sound mix.

All in all, a near-perfect mix of amped up action and pulp science fiction silliness.

Philip Nutman

THE HIDDEN

Starring Michael Nouri, Kyle MacLachlan, Catherine Cannon, Director Jack Shoulder, Distributor Palace

Of all the independent American companies, **New Line** have proved to be the most consistently reliable in terms of value for money, undemanding action-oriented product. Having considerably boosted their financial range and stock market standing through the phenomenal success of the *Nightmare On Elm Street* pictures (due in many respects to the tireless efforts of former publicist **Gary Hertz**, who engineered getting Freddy into the pages of *People* magazine and *Newsweek*), Robert Shaye's outfit continues to deliver.

The Hidden, their science fiction thriller, which generated above average box-office business and garnered a critical thumbs up across the board with populist reviewers like Siskel and Ebert, is simply the most enjoyable crowd-pleaser since *Robocop*.

A buddy-buddy cop movie with a difference (one is human, the other is an alien), the story starts at a rip-roaring pace with a frenetic bank raid and high-speed chase which sets up the relentless, frequently manic proceedings that fill the flick's 96 minutes of screen time.

The central character, a hard-boiled but understanding family man, is LA homicide detective Tom Beck (**Michael Nouri** from *Flashdance*) who, just as he is about to close the file on a seemingly respectable businessman who went on the killing/crime spree shown at the start, is assigned to work with Lloyd Gallagher, an FBI agent from Seattle, who was after the same man.

Lloyd, (portrayed by *Blue Velvet*'s **Kyle MacLachlan**), is stiff, starchy, and clearly reluctant to tell Beck why he is interested in Jack DeVries, the murderous



businessman, and is unhappy when the LA cop informs him DeVries is about to die in hospital.

The plot then flips from police procedural to off-the-wall fantasy as we see the fatally injured DeVries come out of a coma to vomit up a huge insectoid alien which he then forcefeeds to another patient. DeVries collapses; Miller, the patient, suddenly goes AWOL, flees the hospital, kills a record store cashier and embarks on other criminal activities.

This parasitical creature, not content with human bodies, has developed a taste for very loud Heavy Metal music, fast cars and guns!

Beck, of course, is totally unaware what's going on. He can't figure why seemingly-respectable businessmen are turning to random antisocial acts. If Gallagher knows anything, he certainly isn't telling. Beck just assumes he's an anal-retentive, bureaucratic Fed, but seriously starts to wonder who this guy is when he takes him home.

In one of the movie's most amusing scenes, Gallagher has dinner with Beck and his wife (**Catherine Cannon**). Lloyd is not a great conversationalist for



starters, his attempts at small talk are decidedly strange, and he has no real ability with cutlery. After one beer the Fed starts behaving like a teetotaler who has just drunk a bottle of vodka. Although the scene nearly falls into broad comedy it derives most of its domestic drama through amplifying those embarrassing little social faux pas we've all encountered at one time or another.

Eventually Beck learns about the alien organism; it cannot stay inside one body indefinitely and it can only be destroyed as it changes hosts, a plot device that gives director **Jack Shoulder**

BAD DREAMS

Starring: Jennifer Rubin, Bruce Abbot, Robert Lynch.
Producer Gale Anne Hurd, **Director** Andrew Flemming.
Cert 18

Bad Dreams promised to be one of the year's better big studio terror tales because of its credits: produced by Gale Anne Hurd, with **Jennifer Rubin** (*Dream Warriors*) and **Bruce Abbot** (*Re-Animator*) topping the bill, plus **Robert Lynch** as the bad guy, a hideously burned Charlie Manson type who won't stay dead.

Okay, so the plot sounded suspiciously like *Nightmare On Elm Street 3* meets *Poltergeist 2*, but with talents like the above – and a strong supporting cast to boot, including **Harris Yulin** and *LA Law*'s **Susan Ruttan** – one could forgive the potentially familiar elements. Unfortunately, the picture turns out to be only an occasionally funny and mildly suspenseful thriller that is neither gory nor scary enough to fully satisfy horror fans and too uneven in tone to please a wider audience.

Directed by first timer **Andrew Flemming**, a 24-year-old NYU graduate, who displays a competent, if unimaginative, approach to narrative, *Bad Dreams* fuses the trappings of early-Seventies California love cults with the late-Eighties psychobabble, held together by a supernatural hook that wins no prizes for originality.

Cynthia (Rubin) awakes from a 14-year coma to discover that the naivety of her adolescence – she was a member of the Unity Field hippy commune – has been replaced by a confusing technological landscape of VCRs, CDs, MTV, and neurotic yuppies.

Unity Field was run by the charismatic Harris (Lynch) a peace 'n' love guru, who obviously had the hots for the young girl, but once Cynthia regains consciousness she's informed that all her friends died in a mysterious fire and she is the only survivor. Having no memory of the events which occurred that night and faced with a world she does not understand, Cynthia is placed under the care of psychiatrist Dr Berrisford (Yulin) and his assistant, Alex Karmen (Abbot) who run a readjustment programme for borderline personalities.

These are a motley bunch of neurotics, psychotics, addicts, and obsessionals. Cynthia doesn't fit into any of the above categories, though this set-up does give Flemming the opportunity to play with some amusing character interactions, particularly **Susan Ruttan** as a suicidal, chain-smoking journalist, and **Dean Cameron** as

Ralph, a foul-mouthed psychotic self-mutilator with a razor-sharp wit.

Cynthia's main problem is her memory loss concerning the Unity Field fire. Whilst Berrisford and Karmen are concerned with adjusting the girl's personality to the requirements of modern society, the pugnacious detective who investigated the Unity case is only concerned with finding out what happened all those years ago. Played by **Alex Cox**, regular **Sy Richardson** – the detective character – gives the proceedings an edge, being blunt and abrasive by turns.

The counterpoint to the police investigation/personality investigation is Harris, now a member of the ungrateful dead, who pops up at predictable moments to remind Cynthia she must join him and the rest of her 'family' on the other side, though why exactly is never explained, the only possible reason being Harris still has the hots for her and wants someone to boogie with in the Great Beyond. Cue scene of real-time drifting into dream-reality vis-à-vis the *Nightmare On Elm Street* movies, though in this case the question posed by the film makers is, is it live or is it Memorex? Of course, we all know Harris is real, even if he does resemble a walking charcoal-grilled hamburger, and that the deaths which occur throughout the story are his handiwork, not accidents.

When quizzed about *Bad Dreams*'s plot mirroring elements

of *Dream Warrior* and *Poltergeist 2*, Gale Hurd was emphatic that if you wanted to draw such comparisons the film is more akin to Robert Wise's *The Haunting* and *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. Sorry, Gale, *Bad Dreams* is definitely the former rather than the latter.

Bad Dreams is a problematical picture; a horror movie that wants to be something else. What exactly is difficult to determine since its melange of suspense, investigative mystery, visceral shocks, quirky humour and attempt at presenting serious drama results in a confused and frequently perplexing narrative that is frustrating for most of its running time, with only intermittent spurts of crowd-pleasing fun to pull the audience along to its semi-predictable conclusion.

Overall, the film has three main problems: its identity crises, uneven pacing, and its central character.

Bad Dreams is not the first picture to pretend it is something it is not, but in this case the pretence that it is a cut above the rest is a curse rather than an unintentional blessing.

The story starts strongly. The opening shots of Lynch watching a spectacular sunset before entering the brooding gothic house which is home to his family of counter-culture misfits is suffused with an underlying menace that literally explodes when the building suddenly goes up in flames. Cut to: **Sy Richardson**'s arrival as paramedics remove the bodies and the comatose Cynthia is carried to a waiting ambulance, which speeds off into the dark night as the classic psychedelic strains of *The Electric Prunes* *I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night*

blasts through on the soundtrack.

It's a slick, stylish hook, as is the rest of the set-up. Then the pace begins to hiccup until the Lynch character puts in his first undead appearance in a crowded elevator, a scene loaded with claustrophobia, yet undermined by its predictability. Then, halfway through the movie, when events seem to have found a pace that suits the familiar tone of the proceedings, things get rather nasty. Two patients get mangled in the hospital's power system, a situation which cues-up one of the most resonant images in the film. Before you can catch your breath, however, Flemming goes for a double punch when Ralph begins to mutilate himself with a knife while listening to **Sid Vicious** sing *My Way*, a scene which catches the audience off-guard and is guaranteed to induce horrified gasps. But dynamic set pieces like this are few and far between; not enough to save the movie.

The third problem the picture has – and this is a major stumbling block – is Cynthia herself. It's difficult to sympathise with a character who only reacts to situations, never acts decisively. The problem is not Jennifer Rubin's fault; she's clearly a talented actress, but without a strong lead from her director she flounders in uncertainty.

Regardless of these shortcomings, *Bad Dreams* is worth watching, albeit as an interesting failure. Ultimately the film's failure rests on **Andrew Flemming**'s shoulders, though, and the reason for this probably comes from too much film school theory and no real interest in the genre, a factor that limited *Bad Dreams*'s potential from the word go.

Philip Nutman



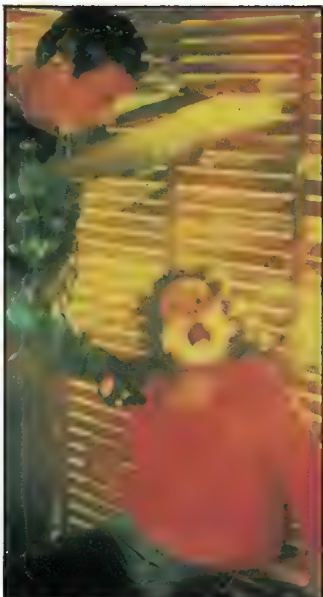
RETRIBUTION

Starring Dennis Lipscomb and Leslie Wing. **Producer** and **Director** Guy Magar. **Distributor** Medusa Home Video. **Release date** to be fixed. **Cert** 18, 108 mins

A look into the future at a film that's just closed on the cinema circuit. *Retribution*'s a story about young, failed artist George Miller, who commits suicide from the roof of his motel apartment but is reanimated by an evil spirit bent on revenge.

During his hospital treatment and psychiatric rehabilitation he begins to believe he's on a mission of vengeance. He lusts to kill people whom he doesn't know but, in some strange way, recognises. The question is, will George give in totally to the murderous impulses or will Jennifer Curtis, his young psychiatric counsellor, be able to save his soul?

John Gilbert

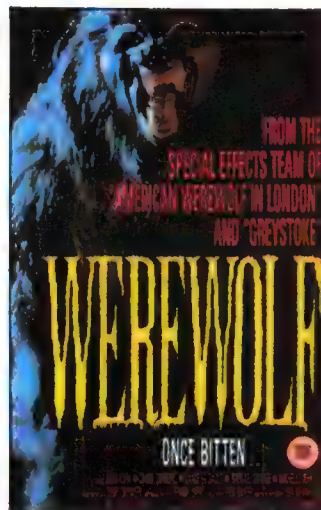


WEREWOLF

Starring John York, Chuck Connors and Lance Le Gault. **Director** David Hemmings. **Distributor** Entertainment. **Cert** 18, 83 mins

At last Tri-Star has released the fabulous pilot to its American television series, *Werewolf*. The film picks up on the life of a boy called Eric Cord who has been bitten by his best friend. And guess what? The friend's a werewolf.

Cord kills his friend and goes in search of the original werewolf, whom he must destroy to rid himself of the lupine curse. But daddy werewolf is a seafarer and



easily evades the younger man. He's also wiser in the ways of the wolf and much stronger in his ability to kill human beings without thought.

Eric Cord, in turn, is being tracked by an Indian bounty hunter, played by Lance Le Gault (who you may remember as the thorn in the side of *The A-Team*.) As the chase continues the full moons stack up and Cord becomes wolfier; before much longer he is destined to be all wolf and little human kindness will remain.

Werewolf has a fantastic cast, a racy plot, and incredible special effects courtesy of **Rick Baker** (*American Werewolf In London*.) It's become a cult in the States. Watch it if you see nothing else.

Steven McCormack

CREEPOZOIDS

Starring: Linnea Quigley, Ken Abraham, Michael Aranda, and Richard Hawkins. **Producers** David DeCocteau, John Schouweiler, **Director** David DeCocteau. **Cert** 18, 90 mins.

as the return of the B-movie, but even that is an insult to some pretty awful films.

Set in 1998, after a – surprise, surprise – nuclear war, when, as one of the characters puts it: 'Civilisation doesn't have all the comforts of civilisation anymore', the film centres around a group of survivors who have made their way out of the acid rain and into a

disused shelter.

It isn't long before their suspicions about the place are roused as it dawns on them that the shelter wasn't designed to keep something out but to keep something in, the something in question being a poor *Alien* imitation that, on reflection, looks more like *It*, *The Terror From Beyond Space*. Indeed, imitation is very much the name of the game here with anything and everything from *Aliens* and *It's Alive* to *Street Trash* being ripped off along the – mercifully short – way. I say mercifully short, although there is some confusion here: according to the box wrapper the film runs for approximately 90 minutes, but it must be very 'approximately' as the copy I saw came in at just over an hour and much of that seemed to be endless creature point-of-view shots as it stalked its victims.

In the highly unlikely event of every other horror/science fiction title being out of stock, rent at all costs. Failing that, avoid like the plague.

John Gullidge



'Recoil in horror at the sight of Creepozoids! Shrink in fear as bodies melt from the inside! Shake with terror at the birth of the Creepozoid baby! Thrill as Ultra Slime makes its first-ever appearance! Boggle at the special effects!

And above all, admire Colourbox for its sales hype for this truly awful movie. I mean, there's bad and there's bad, but this is worse.

Empire's current big screen chiller *Prison* may be a step in the right direction from the makers of such goodies as *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*, but *Creepozoids* is a different kettle of mutated fish entirely. It's being wisely plugged



MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

Starring: Dolph Lundgren, Frank Langella. **Director** Gary Godard. **Distributor** Warner Home Video, **Cert** PG, 101 mins

To the Cannon Group the acquisition of the rights for the live-action adaptation of the hugely successful cartoon series *He-Man* must have seemed a sound, no-risk, investment. The cartoon, after all, was based on the world's topselling range of toys and a movie, blessed with such pre-sold appeal, couldn't possibly fail.

But it did.

Masters Of The Universe stiffed at the box office, which was a shame because the film is really rather good.

Dolph Lundgren, his blond mop held high, plays the muscle-mountain He-Man stoically battling, in jock strap and cape, to protect the universe from the clutches of his evil arch-nemesis Skeletor (**Frank Langella** unrecognisable in dodgy rubber mask), while simultaneously struggling through his monosyllabic dialogue in a fashion that makes Arnie Schwarzenegger sound like Lawrence Olivier.

Beginning on the planet Eternia, where Skeletor has captured the Sorceress who holds the balance between good and evil in the universe, the action swiftly transfers to Earth thanks to budgetary constraints and a cosmic key invented by **Billy Barty**'s diminutive and hairy Gwildor – and here's where the



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film begins to shine.

Followed through space by hordes of Skeletor's troops, He-Man and his three companions – Teela, Man-At-Arms and Gwildor – team up with a couple of teenagers to defeat their foes. But not before the Eternians have devastated a small US town.

It's obvious where first-time director **Gary Godard** and writer **David Odell**'s inspiration lies. The score reaches its *Star Wars*-

inspired crescendo each time the action exceeds walking pace, while Skeletor's army resembles a bunch of Darth Vader clones.

The script may have more holes in it than a pound of Swiss cheese, but **William Stout**'s sets are breathtaking, the sword and laser beam clashes impressive, and after five minutes of viewing you're too engrossed to care anyway. Fast, fanciful, and fun.

Mark Salisbury

DEAD OF NIGHT

Starring Julie Merrill, Kuri Browne, and John Reno. Producer Jessica Rains, Director Deryn Warren. Distributor Medusa Home Video. Cert 18, 85 mins

Lust, voodoo and demonic possession hold sway in low-budget splatter movie from Vista Street Productions. It's the old story of a young, shy but glamorous, girl whose fear of men makes it difficult for her to get along with her horrible hunk of a boyfriend. Sara's sister, on the other hand, has an enormous talent where men are concerned but that further frustrates the poor frumpish girl.

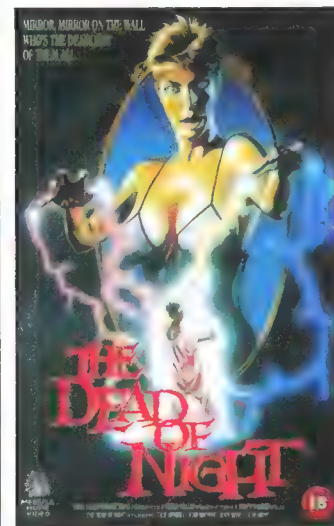
All is not lost, though, and Sara is intrigued by a book on voodoo magic which promises to enhance her figure – or at least make her more adorable to, and promiscuous with, young men – give her money and respect. She just has to follow the instructions and burn a few candles.

But, being a horror flick, we know that things can't be so simple, and sooner or later Sara is not going to be able to control her passions. Ultimately, she's possessed by the evil demon Empress Sura who zaps through her bedroom mirror and forces

her to go to nightclubs where men become her victims. The slaughter count grows and Sara/Sura starts looking ugly – and do we mean ugg-ly, not frumpish like her last incarnation.

Dead Of Night uses themes from many a good movie – including *Hellraiser* and Hammer's *Gorgon* – and the special effects are as crusty as you'd expect on a low-budget pic. But, as the old saying goes, if you want gore you certainly won't want more.

John Gilbert



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AWAKENINGS

Where did it start? Was Dracula the first vampire? Who influenced the writers of the present and who will give the novelists of the future their inspiration? Di Wathen presents the first in an irregular series about the history and trends of fantasy literature

Horror isn't new. It has been around for as long as Man has had an imagination. Monsters roved the written page long before Frankenstein's creation. Grendel and his mother scared hell out of the Danes in *Beowulf* (8th century) and the one-eyed Polyphemus stalked through the *Odyssey* (c 170 BC). A werewolf did the stalking in the *Satyricon* (60 AD). Gilgamesh was searching for immortality as far back as 2000 BC – the fact that his name is still remembered though his author's isn't, shows some measure of success.

Frankenstein's monster launched a host of walking dead . . .

Much more recently – as up-to-date as 1588 – Dr Faustus was selling his soul to the Devil, and think how many others have since followed in his footsteps, usually with disastrous results. **John Webster** thrilled the likes of Charles Lamb with his *White Devil* and *Duchess Of Malfi* in the early-17th century. Approximately 140 years later **Horace Walpole** wrote *The Castle Of Otranto* and launched the whole genre of gothic novels with this tale of madness and murder in a sinister castle. **Ann Radcliffe's** *The Mysteries Of Udolpho* (1794) was just as eerie and frightful, though all was explained by rational means rather than supernatural.

Perhaps, though, the culmination of the gothic novel was *The Monk* by **Matthew Lewis**. Sensational, banned in its day, this has dealings with the Devil, rape, murder and the Spanish Inquisition. How could it fail?

America soon got in on the act. **Charles Brockden Brown's** *Wieland* (1798) had its protagonist driven mad by the voices in his head. This psychological, rather than supernatural, storytelling leads us right through, via **Edgar Allan Poe**, to **Robert Block** – of *Psycho* fame – and other authors who excell in the field today – try, for instance, **David Grubb's** *Night Of The Hunter* or **Thomas Harris's** *Red Dragon*.

The landmarks of the 19th century were the writings of **Poe**, **Mary Shelley's** *Frankenstein* and **Bram Stoker's** *Dracula*, all of which spawned many other books – not to mention films – and still influence so many writers of horror fiction. Poe's was the prose and verse of doom and despair; phobias, fear of the unknown and madness. Frankenstein's monster launched a whole host of the walking dead upon hapless humans, as mad scientists called up what they could not put down.

Dracula was not the first vampire book – **Varney The Vampire** in 1845 was the most well-known previously – but it was certainly the most influential. So many variations of the theme have been written, it seems in danger of becoming stale, though every so often a gem still emerges – for example, *Fevre Dream* by **George RR Martin**.

GHOSTS AND PULPS

Ghost stories became almost required writing in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. **MR James**, **J Sheridan Le Fanu**, and **Algernon Blackwood** are perhaps the period's best-known writers, though nearly everyone had a go from **Charles Dickens** downward.

Other notables were **Henry James** – *The Turn Of The Screw* – and the **Benson Brothers** – *The Room In The Tower* and *The Traveller*.

William Hope Hodgson, who excelled in stories of the sea, and **Arthur Machen** – *The Great God Pan* and *The Three Imposters* – were other important writers of the time.

Pulp magazines, especially *Weird Tales* (1923 to 1954 in its original incarnation) kept the horror tradition alive in literarily lean years. Most noted writer to come from its pages was **HP Lovecraft**, creator of the Cthulhu Mythos – a pantheon of Elder Gods and pseudom mythology. His influence is still felt today, with many acclaimed writers contributing to the canon of Mythos tales, including **Robert Bloch**, **Ramsey Campbell** and **Stephen King**. Others who made their names from *Weird Tales* include **August Derleth**, **Ray Bradbury**, **Robert E Howard** and **Manly Wade Wellman**.

POST-WAR PERIOD

The Fifties echoed to such talents as **Fritz Leiber** – *Night's Black Agents* and *Conjure Wife* – and **Shirley Jackson** – *The Haunting Of Hill House* and *The Lottery*. Also, **Charles Beaumont** and **Richard Matheson**, both of whom were involved in scriptwriting, with many *Twilight Zone* episodes to their credit as well as such fine books as *Yonder*, *Night Ride* (Beaumont) and *I Am Legend* and *The Shrinking Man* (Matheson.)

The resurgence of horror films in the late-Fifties, together with best-selling novels such as *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* coupled with the current success of **Stephen King**, has resulted in a great upsurge in the output of horror fiction. It is now the second most popular fictional form, according to a quote in *The New York Times*. As well as main publishing outlets, many specialist presses have come into existence, producing quality books aimed mostly at the collectors' market. That a growing number of those manage to exist and sell their product shows the increasing demand for this type of fiction.

SMALL PRESS

Arkham House were the pioneers, set up in 1939 to promote the works of HP Lovecraft. Their horizons have since broadened with the first books by **Ray Bradbury** and **Fritz Leiber**, and they now publishing works by **Lucius Shepard**, **Charles L Grant** and **Basil Cooper**.

Scream/Press, established in the US in 1982, continues this tradition. The company's books are superbly illustrated – mainly by

JK Potter – and their roster reads like a who's who in modern horror fiction. **Ramsey Campbell** – interviewed on page 48 with a short story on page 50 – **Robert Bloch**, **Clive Barker**, **Dennis Etchison**, **Karl Edward Wagner**, and **Stephen King**.

Dark Harvest, also from the States, provides works by **Dean R Koontz**, **George RR Martin** and **Joes Lansdale** amongst others, as well as their excellent Night Visions series, each volume containing fiction by three top writers in the genre.

BESTSELLERS

Without doubt, **Stephen King** is the current best-selling author of horror. A master storyteller, he takes ordinary, interesting people like you and I – you're bound to identify with them – so that the fear creeps in; you're totally involved from beginning to end, be it

vampires – *Salem's Lot* – a rabid dog – *Cujo* – or a psychotic Plymouth Fury – *Christine*. For *The Talisman* he teamed up with another respected author, **Peter Straub** – see the **FEAR** interview on page 50.

Also notable is **Dean R Koontz**, who started writing in the science fiction genre in 1968 and has turned more and more to horror, with recent bestsellers such as *Phantoms*, *Twilight Eyes* and *Watchers* – watch out for a **FEAR** interview soon. Like King, Koontz uses very human characters who lift his work way above average.

Virginia Andrews reached the top with her combination of children and horror – *Flowers In The Attic* and its sequels – while *Rambo* propelled **David Morrell** to fame.

James Herbert – see next issue for a **FEAR** interview – is the top British author, indeed, he is said to outsell Stephen King in Britain. His books are somewhat gory and violent, though extremely popular – *The Rats*, *Moon*, *Sepulchre* and,

soon, *Haunting*.

Animals on the rampage are a favourite of goremaster **Guy N Smith** – *Crabs On The Rampage* is a title to remember, while **Shaun Hutson** – *Slugs* and *Relics* – believes in sensationalism rather than subtlety. To him a chainsaw is more effective than a ghost any day – read his short story on page 14.

So, these are some of the writers past and present. Others who deserve mention are **Jack Cady** with *The Jonah Watch*, **Bernard Taylore** with the superb ghost story *Sweetheart*, *Sweetheart*, the urban terror of **TM Wright** with *A Manhattan Ghost Story*, **F Paul Wilson** with *The Tomb*, **Michael McDowell**, **TED Klein**, and **Alan Ryan** to name but a few.

There's a lot of talent out there, check it out, keep buying, and who knows, horror may shortly become the most popular form of fiction.

Without doubt, Stephen King is the current best-selling author of horror.

LIGHTNING

Dean R Koontz
Publisher Headline, Format
Paperback, £1.96
Category Science Fiction/
Thriller/Romance



Who, amongst modern writers, can be in fantasy, horror, science fiction, romance and thriller genres all at the same time and yet be in none of them?

You get no prizes for guessing it's Dean R Koontz, whose own superb sense of action, description and style constantly propels him into the the *New York Times* bestseller list. Dean has been popular in Britain too, but he's never had a bestseller over here. That's all about to change with the launch of *Lightning*, a crackling good mainstream read which nevertheless contains mystery, science fiction and thrills.

Page one is where this novel starts – not halfway through the second chapter like so many others – when a mysterious stranger saves a pregnant woman from the scalpel of a drunken doctor. As her child, called Laura, grows up, the man, whose name

she doesn't know, constantly saves her from danger.

An electrical storm usually heralds the mystery man's arrival, hence the title. But it is lightning which Laura has learned to fear from childhood, and its connection with the stranger makes her begin to wonder if he is a saviour or a devil in disguise. His strange accent adds to the suspicion and his willingness to kill anyone who stands against him makes her wonder whether she is ultimately in danger from her hero. It is lightning, however, which eventually saves Laura, and her young son, Chris, from death.

As with most of Dean's other books, which include *Watchers*, *Twilight Eyes* and *Strangers*, mystery is used as the pivotal plot device just as character is used mercilessly to provoke powerful emotions in the reader – and I'm not exaggerating. Puzzle upon puzzle is built up, multiple answers are suggested, some of which could be feasible while with others you know the author is having you on, but towards the end of the book when the revelations start rolling, nothing will have prepared you that sudden understanding shock you get. Not since the days of Agatha Christie has there been such a master of mystery.

And yet, *Lightning* is not a coldly plotted, methodical whodunnit with no sense of characterisation or sense of location. I guarantee you'll experience some pretty heady emotions as you move from prologue to climax. It's, also, not

just a matter of reading from point A to B. You'll go through a whole alphabet of mini-climax as you notch your way up to the biggie – and it's *special*.

It's always been a pleasure to read a new Dean R Koontz novel. I come to each one prepared to accept it as a failure if it's not as good as the last, but I've never been disappointed. He's a master of technique but also capable of constructing the human interest that makes him a mainstream, rather than a genre, novelist.

John Gilbert

1998

Richard Turner & William Osborne
Publisher Sphere, Format
Paperback, £2.99,
Can \$5.95
Category Socio-science
fiction comedy



'Sensational, futuristic super-shocker based on the hilarious radio series . . . ' blares the cover blurb. If that makes you immediately think of Douglas Adams and his inept hero's attempts at cadging lifts round the

known galaxy, you wouldn't be too far from a particular restaurant at the end of a certain universe.

As a reviewer of this book, I have an advantage: I've never heard of, let alone listened to, the aforementioned radio show, sorry.

But a book should stand alone – Adams's were books before radio programmes – and I'm not convinced that 1998 entirely manages that; had I listened to the show, it might all now seem funnier.

Not that 1998 falls flat in the comedy stakes: the sad, but ultimately vindicating, tale of Edward Wilson – a 'low-profile wimp' contains some very offbeat, funny moments. What's wrong with the book is that, as the sanest man around, he's set against characters just too daft to carry the intended satirical bite.

This is an England which exists somewhere between Cyber- and Splatterpunk; a sadly-reduced nation, referred to as the Environment, about to be taken over by the all-powerful Matterhorn family – leaders of the ruling AmJap hegemony (based in sunny Hawaii.) They want to turn Britons into slaves working treadmills for electricity (cheap simplicity). It's an easily-undertaken task since the populace are already slaves to lifestyles as diverse as Seventeenth century religious fundamentalism (turning Amish) and monochrome Sixties 'genuine oop north' British living as portrayed in films the likes of *A Taste Of Honey*. It could be said to be taking kitchen-sink escapism too far.

All that's left in the dreary flip

from style to style is to become momentarily famous before the all-too today-familiar roving TV cameras, hellbent on creating news wherever there's a suitable location. Against this background Edward Wilson flails against the AmJap conspiracy in a manner reminiscent of an early-Evelyn Waugh hero: which is to say he's pretty ineffectual, blown by forces madly beyond his control, like a dandelion seed on the wind.

The law of averages works in his favour as much as against – his lethally ambitious management agent, whom he unwillingly inherits by accident, is offset by the happy fluke that The Leopard (a psychopathic killer) falls in love with Edward and splats several of his most vicious opponents at convenient moments. But the book's only real tension is provided by betting with yourself on the outcome of the alternating

luck game – puff – she loves me – puff – she loves me not – will he end up lucky or remaindered?

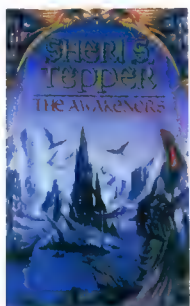
There's little way of avoiding a comparison with *Hitch-Hiker's* (indeed, the book's back cover positively encourages it), the satirical writing style (overstated understatement, bland incomprehension of people lost in space, time and their appetites) is similar, but Adams maintains a more wryly believable universe than Turner and Osborne's, and his characters are more satisfactory because they are better-observed.

Still, in critics' sop jargon: if you liked the radio show, you will doubtless enjoy this 198-page book. I did chuckle occasionally, I admit it, but it left me as lightly as a dandelion seed, wishing for something of more substance.

Roger Kean

THE AWAKENERS

Sheri S Tepper
Publisher Bantam Press,
Format Paperback, £6.95
Category Fantasy



Sheri S Tepper started writing adult fantasy novels during the early Eighties, though her books for children have been on bookshop shelves for many years.

There's something of the child in her latest novel, *The Awakeners*, though it comes from a dark wonder within the story, rather than any immaturity in style. *The Awakeners* is the story of two young people, Thrasne and Pamra, set on and around the River world which houses a number of incredible trading and religious communities.

Life is governed by logical, inbred rituals of natural law. For instance, the River flows in one direction and it is in that direction which all life must travel. Guards are set at settlement boundaries to ensure that nobody travels the wrong way and if you want to visit a town which is only a little way in the wrong direction you must follow the river all the way around the world until you get to your destination.

Death is also ruled by those rituals and governed by The

Awakeners. The religious sect promotes the myth that when you die you must be sorted out, your sins weighed by the moon god Potipur, and if you've committed no sins you're reawakened to work for The Awakeners. In reality, however, just as the inviting waters of the River hold fish which turn flesh to wood, the dead, awakened by drugs, are little more than slaves whose flesh quickly turns blue and rots.

Thrasne, a young boatman, and Pamra, an Awakener initiate, discover the terrifying secret of the River world and set out to try and find a way to awaken the living populace to the barbarity that awaits them in death. As a result they start on a path toward the destruction of the world and, hopefully, the resurrection of a new one.

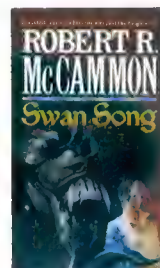
Hope, according to Sheri Tepper, is a keyword in all her novels and, indeed, the need for hope is scored deeply throughout her stories. Her endings are usually upbeat, although they can contain a nugget of darkness which holds the reader's interest until the sequel, but, eventually, she wants to lift emotions rather than cause depression. She succeeds in that aim with *The Awakeners* which, nevertheless, is a book long enough to contain some chilling passages; you're left with no doubt that a great deal of the River world's fauna is deadly.

If you're tired of constant gore or, in a rut with your favourite author, haven't tried a Tepper novel yet, *The Awakeners* will soon add another favourite author to your shortlist.

John Gilbert

SWAN SONG

Robert R McCammon
Publisher Sphere, Format
Paperback £3.99
Category General fiction/
horror/science fiction



Armageddon and apocalypse are two of the most overused words in the dictionaries of horror and science fiction. Mid-Seventies movies such as the *Omen* trilogy and books such as Stephen King's blockbuster *The Stand* have shown that the End of the World scenario is a favourite amongst us war-torn human beings.

The ultimate battle field has been quiet of late and that's probably one of the reasons why Robert McCammon chose it as the subject of the longest book he's ever written. At 956 pages of

sugary emotion, horror, and mystery, *Swan Song* is an exhausting read. It's certainly not a book which should be read in one sitting: even if your eyes could take it you'd probably not be able to keep up with the huge cast of characters and subplots.

Swan Song certainly has a more complex plot structure than *The Stand*. The heroine, Swan, is a young girl with the power to bring life back to the radiation-blasted land. Her opponent is an evil shapechanger with many names who has the seed of good within him but, despite Swan's attempts to make him recant, he won't meet his need for forgiveness half way.

We're also introduced to a large negro boxer and an all-American bag lady called Sister during the first quarter of the novel. The boxer is with Swan when Armageddon calls but the girl doesn't meet Sister until the strains of the finale are being woven into the plot – at the halfway point in the novel. From there the little band has to defeat an army of Excellence lead by a boy and ex-military man whose minds have broken, while

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constantly questing for the final stand against the shapechanger.

Swan Song is a science fiction novel, with touches of fantasy, but it includes lengthy passages of horror. The shapechanger – the obvious focus of this horror – is, however, less frightening than the physical mutations which ripple through the bodies of the main characters. Just as Swan becomes more beautiful, so those who do evil grow ugly and mad.

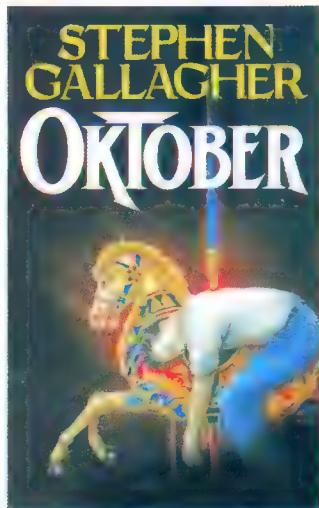
Fans of Stephen King would accuse me of a cop-out if I didn't compare *Swan Song* to *The Stand*. It's true that some of McCammon's books seem to follow a pattern inherited from King's: for *They Thirst* take King's *Salem's Lot*, for *Baal* take *Carrie*. It appears as if Robert McCammon has used an idea from Stephen King and transformed, twisted, it into something which is utterly his own. Only McCammon knows if this is the case but as far as *Swan Song* is concerned its merits and faults are not those of *The Stand*.

Swan Song's plot and characters are painted with a larger brush. Character motive is shown from the start and there are few surprises in that direction. Even the shapechanger can be second-guessed by a reasonably intelligent reader as to which disguise he's assumed. On the other hand while *The Stand* is a concentrated story *Swan Song* is as broad as its characters and you'll find enough images to keep you thinking about it for weeks after its conclusion.

John Gilbert

OKTOBER

Stephen Gallagher
Publisher Hodder & Stoughton, Format
Hardback, £9.95
Category Thriller/science fiction



Stephen Gallagher's followers always knew he'd be a bestselling author, right from the word go. His books *Follower*, *Chimera* and *Valley Of Lights* have gained him an eager, ever-increasing number of fans and now, at last, his publisher has done him justice by giving him the publicity that his work deserves.

His latest, *Oktober*, is a well-researched thriller which starts

relatively slowly but suddenly comes on line as Jim Harper, the forgotten English guest of a group of very rich yuppies, is attacked and almost killed by a Husky dog minder. No ordinary minder this, though; he works at a top-secret research establishment in the middle of a snowy nowhere and the drug used to bring Harper around is experimental.

When Jim is rehabilitated and back in England, he finds himself involved with the dangerous secrets of an international drugs company. He is bushwacked and betrayed during his hurried search to find the truth and then escape the killing consequences of that knowledge. Soon, however, he discovers an almost supernatural way to protect himself as well as a devastating method of revenge.

I was almost tempted to call *Oktober* a horror novel when I'd put it down after the final page. Its climax is horrifying, but once you've allowed it to wear in a bit you can see the book with a wider, and wiser, scope. The world in which the book is set is timeless and, almost, placeless. You'll find few place names on any page, although the sense of place – the chill of the snow, the rot which has set in to the small English seaside town where Harper goes job hunting, and the antiseptic computerised atmosphere of the drug corporation's headquarters – is never lost.

Also, despite Stephen's very journalistic approach – which he has not used in all of his novels – you never forget that this is a fast-

paced thriller. You might think such an approach would make it difficult to convey character, but no; the main characters in this book – from Harper the hero, through Bruno the sadistic drug company stooge, to yuppie-bitch Rochelle Genoud – are all real.

The book is mostly written in the third person from Harper's point of view, so Gallagher has been able to cloud the motives of all the characters – including those of the hero. Friends can really be enemies and those enemies have realistic flaws which make them vulnerable.

Stephen Gallagher has provided yet another piece of fine fiction, worth every pound of the hardback price. *Oktober* also shows why Hodder and Stoughton is one of the biggest British publishers. It keeps picking winners.

Mark Westerby

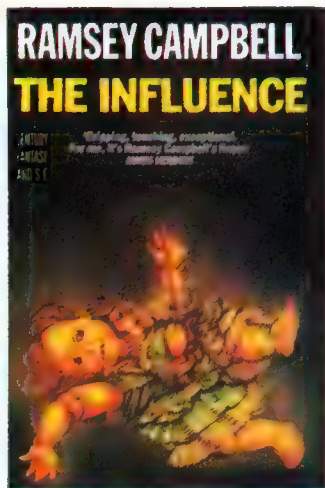
THE SCREAM

John Skipp & Craig Spector
Publisher Bantam. Format
Paperback, US\$3.95
To be released in UK in
September, price to be set.

The *Scream* opens with one of the sickest, snappiest opening paragraphs any horror

THE INFLUENCE

Ramsey Campbell
Publisher Century, Format
Hardback, £9.95
Category Horror



Influence is a term which sums up Ramsey Campbell's writing life. It is through his influence – direct or indirect – that writers such as Clive Barker, Stephen King and TED Klein have burst onto horror's map.

It's poetic justice, therefore, that he should choose *The Influence* as the title for his latest book. The influence in question is the oppressive power that an old woman, Queenie, has over her relatives – particularly the family with which she lives. She is, quite literally, a queen and it is the misfortune of her niece, Alison, Alison's husband, Derek and their daughter, Rowan, to live in her dusty, woodwormed palace. They're trying to move out, but Derek doesn't earn enough money to place them in a house.

When Queenie dies the family's problems appear to be over but some of Queenie's last words – 'She [Rowan] reminds me of myself at her age' – eventually make Alison wonder if her daughter isn't possessed by the

spirit of her dead, though not so dear, aunt.

Rowan picks up a demanding new friend, Vicky, which happens to be Queenie's real name. Vicky slowly drags Rowan away from reality, fragments her love for her family and eventually fragments her personality so that something else, a more domineering spirit is required to drive her frail body.

Nobody seems to care about the emotional pain Rowan suffers, but her mother begins to believe that something is wrong. Relatives who stumble over the truth – such as Alison's sister, Hermione – die in accidents and under mysterious circumstances. Yet, nobody would believe what Alison thinks she knows. She's left with more than a dilemma to resolve; it's a battle for her daughter's existence.

The Influence explores unhealthy preoccupations with the past, the fear of dying and a willingness to pervert your own soul to hang on to life. It shows the lengths to which people will go for immortality. It is the sort of supernatural ending that you could attach to Miss Havesham's

life in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* – complete with revenge on The Father of humanity and a perverse – sad – joy at seeing the sufferings of those you should love.

On the surface, Ramsey's book contains very little love. Queenie's austere dominance together with Alison's and Derek's familial problems are like a dust caked on glass. When Ramsey finishes up, though, you'll find some surprises – not just changes – in character as well as plot.

In last analysis, the book is character-driven, although that doesn't mean that the story, which appears to be forced into a narrow tube until it explodes at the exit, plays second fiddle; no, it's a pleasure to review a book with such perfectly interwoven themes, characters and subplots. All these facets are so tightly woven that, as in Ramsey's other novels, you can see character through landscape and themes through story line.

John Gilbert



novel has sprung on its readers (see opening quote in the feature on page 24.) It works as a warning to the wary, basically stating 'abandon all hope ye who enter here', because this book goes for broke from line one.

Most slick, mass market fiction of this sort starts with a predictable 'teaser' opening in which at least one person gets slaughtered by the antagonist. But in true Splatterpunk fashion, Skipp and Spector kill off an entire partying group of drink-and-drugged, horny, hard-rock-loving teens at the hands of a roving band of semi-zombified sickos.

Welcome to the author's nightmare.

The Scream, it must be stated up front, is a fairly conservative, moralistic Good-vs-Evil saga with rigidly-drawn Manichean lines between the heroes and villains. The eponymous band are the type of musicians that the morally righteous have been warning us about for years: not satisfied with playing at Satanic shenanigans (ie sexually abusing groupies before sacrificing them) their whole *raison d'être* is to raise a monstrous demon from the depths of Hell.

On the side of good are the Jacob Hamer Band, rock 'n' rollers with a healthy New Age outlook on life. Jacob and his clan are clean-living (at least in music business terms) and are the only people with enough intelligence to realise what *The Scream* are up to.

The book's backdrop is the

current conflict between American right-wing fundamentalism and the recording industry over the minds and morals of US teens. The Born Agains blame rock for corrupting the innocence of youth while performers like Frank Zapper cry 'Fascism!' and warn rightly of the impending death of creative freedom.

On the flipside of the narrative's subtextual concerns is the emotional and mental scars of the Vietnam experience, an element which the authors tie economically into the main thrust of the plot. It was here, in blood-soaked jungles, that the demonic force began to take shape. Consequently, these flashback sequences provide some of the most vivid in the book, displaying an authenticity that firmly indicates Skipp and Spector's development as writers.

The novel's only real weak point is Jacob Hamer who appears too squeaky-clean as a hero. A committed family man and even-tempered liberal, he comes across more like a member of Genesis than a hard rockin' dude. When counterpointed against the twisted mentalities of *The Scream*, Hamer is a rather bland individual.

Some of the other characters appear clichéd, particularly the devout Reverend who desperately wants to save the innocent souls of teens led astray by The Evil That Is Rock Music whilst being plagued by selfloathing over his sexual desires. Despite these less than satisfactory aspects, *The Scream* is a compelling page-turner.

Even if the aural backdrop of *The Scream* is the type of music you loathe, it has more than enough to satisfy even the most jaded reader.

You want to rock? This is the book to give you the roll.

And then some.

Philip Nutman

appeal to the adherents of both genres. It contains all the menace of *The Dark and Domain*, exudes the supernatural and physical terrors of *The Shrine* and includes none of the gentle moments found in *Magic Cottage* or *Fluke*.

What you get, however, is a tightly written plot in the mode of Robert Ludlum, but with a style that can only be that of James Herbert. The descent into *Sepulchre* is deceptively easy. Herbert starts with a downbeat introduction to the Summerians, an ancient race with some strange gods. Then the story starts and we immediately meet the central character, Halloran, a security consultant who's in the middle of dealing with an IRA hostage situation and several men who would kill him if he was not a negotiator.

Back in London he's asked to protect a psychic prospector, called Kline, who can detect valuable mineral deposits anywhere within the world by using only his mind. Kline appears to believe that another company has sent its hitmen out to kill him and stop the flow of information he's giving his bosses.

The psychic is the kingpin of the

tightly-controlled plot. Halloran has to deal with inept businessmen, IRA assassins, and a pair of sadistic homosexual perverts during the course of the book, but it is to Kline's country mansion, set by a glowing lake, that he comes for the climax. *Sepulchre* is crammed with action which races by until you meet the monster of the piece. And what a monster, tied as it is to Kline and the secrets of his country pad, which seems unsettling on first inspection and surprised even me during the final chapters.

Popularity is not a reason in itself to praise a writer. There are many authors who are popular but do the horror genre no justice; James Herbert has been a writer for more than a decade and is one of the few people who can still surprise me. His novel releases appear to be carefully planned so that you can never tell whether he's going to bring out a thriller, such as *The Rats*, or a softer, more subtle tale of the supernatural. He's a shrewd businessman as well as an inventive, entertaining writer. And, so far, he's got my vote every time. *Sepulchre* is to be read with relish—as red as you can get.

John Gilbert



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Sheri S Tepper's
fabulous new
fantasy novel
THE AWAKENERS**



Join Sheri S Tepper, one of America's most famous fantasy and horror novelists, on her journey upon the swift, dark, currents of *The River*. This gushing stretch of water is the lifeline connecting a series of trading settlements in a world dominated by *The Awakeners*, a religious sect with the power to enslave the dead.

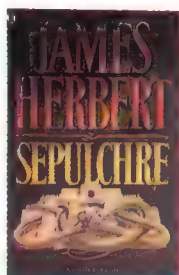
Pamra Don, the book's tragic heroine, devastated by her mother's death and drawn into the priesthood, discovers the terrifying secrets of *The River*, and, after making an uneasy pact with Thrasne, a young boatman, sets out to free her people.

Sheri Tepper is a prominent writer of horror fiction, as well as fantasy. To have a chance of winning a signed copy of *THE AWAKENERS* just tell us the name of the family which links her novels *BLOOD HERITAGE* and *THE BONES* together.

Scribble the answer on a postcard or the back of a sealed envelope and send it to: *The Awakeners Competition*, FEAR, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. All entries should be received by August 16 1988 when the first five correct replies drawn will win. Employees of Newsfield Publications and Transworld Publishers are ineligible.

SEPULCHRE

James Herbert
Publisher New English
Library, Format
Paperback, £3.50
Category: Horror/Thriller



It's that time of year again. The time when fans on the lookout for something new get excited about the latest from Britain's most popular horror writer, and critics get out their knives for steak à la Herbert.

James Herbert's latest paperback release, *Sepulchre* will delight those fans who didn't pick up the hardback last year, confound the critics yet again by making it to the Number One slot on numerous bestseller lists and one more thing: appeal to a wider audience than any of his horror novels have done before.

Sepulchre is a thriller with horrific overtones which will

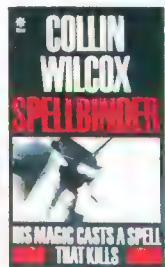
FIEND

I always thought that Commie fever died in the Seventies, but horror writer **Guy N Smith** obviously believes that we're still scared of reds under the bed. His new book, *Fiend* (Sphere paperback, £2.99), resurrects a very porcine Russian leader, called Andre Keshev, and turns him into a murdering maniac. I have a grudging respect for Smith who has a huge following and who's other work is literate if not the stuff of great horror fiction. I can recommend *Fiend* on one count: the storyline is unusual enough to make you pluck it off the bookshelf. It's an easy, gory, read, which will quickly dispell the boredom of a holiday bus or train ride and have you thinking about all those Russian missiles yet again. Not one for the kids, though.



SPELLBINDER

Collin Wilcox is relatively new to the WH Allen stable, but his first book, *Night Games* – a realistic detective thriller with horrific overtones – was an instant success. The same will hopefully be true of his new novel, *Spellbinder* (WH Allen paperback, £2.99.) It's cast as crime fiction, but has all the elements which make for good horror – in the vein of Stephen Gallagher's *Valley Of Lights*. It's a Lieutenant Frank Hastings book in which 14 young, white prostitutes, are all found dead in hotel rooms across America. The book reveals the crazy power of television evangelists – in this instance Austin Holloway who's described as the The Spellbinder because of his high-octane preaching performances. Hastings believes Austin, and his Will of God, are involved with the murders. He just has to prove it. Collin Wilcox yet again shows how brittle human reason can be and how it can reverse into forms of perverted logic. Brilliant.



THE WYRM

Few people hold up the traditional values of horror better than **Stephen Laws**. If his first and second novels, *Ghost Train* and *Spectre*, vibrate with dread, his latest, *The Wurm* (Souvenir Press hardback, £9.95), drips it from every page. First you're introduced to Michael Lambton,



a horror writer who has come to the countryside to forget the madness his own books instilled within him and his inability to write. The horror's not out of his life for long, though. An ancient gibbet is hauled from the centre of a crossroads to make way for a motorway. An ancient evil comes with it, ready to vampirise the life essence of the nearby village, and to create a hell on Earth. The book echoes Ian Watson's *The Power*, in which a village is cut off by an ancient threat. But whereas Watson's book fails, because of a penchant for too much left-wing politics from the central character, Laws provides an excellent, breathtaking, morbid read. He builds his plot shock upon shock, killing off protagonists mercilessly, until the final scenes come down more like a nail-spiked bludgeon than a smooth, clean, swift, guillotine.

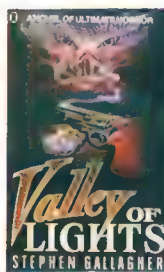
TREAD SOFTLY

You won't be surprised to learn that **Richard Kelly**, the author of *Tread Softly* (WH Allen, paperback, £2.99) is Richard Laymon, whose previous works include *The Cellar* and *Beast House*. This cynical, gore-splattered book involves a group of campers who kill the mutant, sex-crazed son of a swamp witch. She curses the campers who start to suffer from convenient accidents. The book includes lashings of teeny sex, graphic violence, and a very downbeat ending. Does nothing for the horror genre.



VALLEY OF LIGHTS

Stephen Gallagher again, but this time in horror mode and with a startling, original monster. The creature in *Valley Of Lights* (New English Library, paperback, £1.95) is a mixture of body snatcher, vampire and chameleon. It doesn't have a body of its own and uses others which it has reduced to a comatose condition to put on different masks. It's a mass child murderer and enjoys killing, but what can a cop like Alex Volchak do when confronted with such a menace? How will he know if the creature



is the man or woman standing next to him? The moment you get serious with this book you'll be hooked into a compulsive read. The humorously startling conclusion can only come as a bonus.

WATCHERS

Two genetically mutated animals, one a labrador the other a brutish monster, escape from a government research centre. The dog finds a home with an old real-estate agent, while the creature goes on a killing spree. The government are after both and a psychotic assassin is after the dog. He'll not let anyone get in his way. So starts **Dean R Koontz's** *Watchers* (Headline, paperback, £3.50), a heart-rending tale in which you never know whether the characters for which you're rooting will survive. As excellently crafted as all Koontz's books, the story is long, involved, and chillingly possible in today's scientific climate.



DELIVER US FROM EVIL

As Bantam releases more horror novels in Britain, we begin to see the new talents they've been hiding from us. One such is **Allen Lee Harris** whose first book, *Deliver Us From Evil* (Bantam, paperback, £3.95) takes horror back to its roots – in the American backwoods. The prophetic entrance of an orphan boy to the sleepy town of Lucerne stirs ancient evil from a snake well. Fourteen years earlier a young girl had been viciously killed near the town and it's that evil which is again calling. The orphan and the sheriff's son, who is not nearly as idiotically rustic as most of the town's other inhabitants, discover Lucerne's terrible secret and are the only ones around to do battle with the Devil. Despite my humble attempts to disclose the plot, *Deliver Us From Evil* is a book of character rather than a slasher's party. It delivers good, strong shocks, but lifts itself out of the gore stream with some nifty character development. Unfortunately, the author hasn't yet learned the trick of paraphrasing dialects, which slow down the reading mind, but I certainly don't hold that against Allen Lee Harris, whose next book should be something to write home about. Keep an eye on this man.

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FEAR competition

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a rare signed short story anthology including the works of Stephen King, Clive Barker, Peter Straub, Ramsey Campbell, Whitley Strieber and M. John Harrison. Edited by Douglas E. Winter. Signed by the masters themselves at the convention. A rare opportunity to possess the autographs of some of the world's greatest horror writers along with their most chilling works!

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➡ **ASSASSIN:** Shaun Hutson's latest hardback super-chiller

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Five lucky runners-up will receive copies of all the books from our Hot FEAR Collection



NOW! Simply separate the following list of authors into their correct genre categories: Fantasy, Horror or Both (tick the appropriate boxes), and you could be on your way . . .

1. Author	Fantasy	Horror	Both
1. James Herbert	☐	☐	☐
2. Sheri S Tepper	☐	☐	☐
3. Ramsey Campbell	☐	☐	☐
4. Stephen King	☐	☐	☐
5. Stephen R Donaldson	☐	☐	☐
6. Bernard King	☐	☐	☐

Send the entry coupon (or a photocopy) to: **World Fantasy Competition, FEAR, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB.** All entries must be received by August 16, at which point correct entries will be drawn.

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

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No members of Newsfield Ltd, Transworld Publishers, Century Hutchinson, or WH Allen may take part. All entrants to be at least age 16. No responsibility can be taken on the part of the publishers, the organisers or The Ramada Inn West London Hotel for the welfare of the winner of the competition – though we don't want to scare yah!

TOWARD ANCIENT IMAGES

In the first of a two-part interview,
John Gilbert
talks to the greatest
living influence
in horror fiction
— RAMSEY CAMPBELL



iverpool. The dusty, bruised, city of comedians where film stars don't die but monsters are born.

Ramsey Campbell knows about those monsters; the knife-wielding psychos, the babies who gnaw their way out of mother's womb, the nameless secret societies intent on evil, and the dark antigods waiting to reclaim the earth and destroy its human inhabitants. He can sit quietly in the front room of his Wallasey home, where he lives with his wife and two children, and imagine them at work across the water — or perhaps record . . .

His genius for writing subtle, disturbing, horror tales makes him quite simply the greatest living influence in world horror. Few writers will ever achieve the sales of Stephen King, but Campbell's works, which are similar in unique content and construction to the works of classical music to which he listens while writing, will achieve the longevity afforded to the likes of Lovecraft and Machen. The difference is that the classic nature of his stories and novels has been established during his lifetime, not after his death.

JG: Most of the interviews with you tend to dwell on the Lovecraftian influences that got you started but, more basically still, was it a need to write or just the

thrill of the horror genre? Were you a writer or an author?

RC: I think I was basically trying to repay the pleasure I was getting from the field way before I'd started reading Lovecraft or was conscious of doing so. I'd started reading adult ghost stories at an extraordinarily early age, which I suspect many of us do anyway, and so when I read MR James, when I was eight or nine, and Sheridan LeFanu and so forth, I found these utterly terrifying and lay awake in bed afterward.

It could only have been the imaginative appeal of these stories — the fact that they did somehow open my mind up even to that sense of terror — that was the appeal, because certainly I was not getting that much fun out of lying quaking in bed all night. And so I think I started trying to write the kind of story I liked at a very early age, certainly when I was nine or ten years old. What I was doing at the beginning was taking chunks of stories I'd liked and putting them together where they didn't really fit together.

It was an admiration for Lovecraft that enabled me to do one single thing, which was to model myself on what I admired about Lovecraft. Now I didn't always get it right partly because I tended to get impatient with the Lovecraftian structure. At that age — 14 or 15 — I don't think you do have that amount of patience to take that much care and that much time with

the very subtle, gradual build up, and I came back to that later on. But it was a way of completing stories which had some dramatic build-up and force rather than simply being bits strung together. Although most of them were not very good, they did show me that I could write within those terms.

I don't think there's anything wrong, though, with imitation, Beethoven's first symphony sounds like Hayden, and Wagner's first symphony sounds like Beethoven. It's useful to have a model to imitate so you can actually learn your craft. Then you have enough technique to shoot off in your own direction and find out what you sound like and what you personally want to write about.

THE LOVECRAFT EFFECT

JG: Was your reason for entering into the genre also because you want to duplicate the effect that horror had on you for other people?

RC: No, what I wanted to do originally was have the same effect on myself that reading Lovecraft had had. I didn't have any implicit audience apart from myself. I just wanted to convince myself that I was able to do it the same way, and it was only later, when I got on to *Demons By Daylight*, that I was to some extent trying to give the reader the kind of pleasure that I'd had from the field.

What's important about that in

"— the principle I tend to use is you show enough to suggest more."

terms of how I was writing was that because I'd found the classic English ghost stories not merely chilling but extremely frightening, I also wanted my stories to be extremely frightening, and so in a sense I was kind of raising the ante.

I'm not sure that's unique. Sometimes the horror field seems to be seen in terms of an escalation of effect, but when you actually look back over it it's surprising how quickly that escalation began.

JG: Do you think readers scare themselves as a reaction rather than just a direct result of a horror story, whether it escalates in its horror content or not?

RC: Yes. Well I think this comes down to another principle of writing horror fiction, the principle that I tend to use: which is you show enough to suggest more. Lovecraft does it, MR James does it, I've tried to do it, Ted Klein does it. Inevitably, to that extent you're abrogating your wish to control the reader's reaction. You want the reader to see more than, perhaps, you imagined in the first place.

That said, you also have the responsibility to make vivid what you are trying to produce. There's no point in saying it's too horrible for my poor words to even begin to convey to you – that's no good at all.

A slightly different, perhaps contradictory, answer to that is that yes I'm trying to disturb the reader rather than frighten, but ultimately I'm still writing things because when I visualise them in the act of writing they actually frighten me. I think, 'my God, this is terrifying, this is disturbing, this is great', I'm thinking all of those things and, therefore, I want to communicate it to you.

It gives me immense pleasure to be terrified by fiction because in good horror fiction you can't separate the terror from the awesomeness. The best horror fiction seems to me to astonish as well as simply to send you cowering off into a corner. That's why I'm not particularly interested in disgust as an aspect of horror fiction. There is horror fiction which works in terms of disgust. David Cronenberg – *Scanners*, *The Brood*, *The Fly* and, later this year, *Twins* – is the great example. He shows you things you thought you couldn't look at and challenges you to do something with the fact that you're actually looking at them. It's not particularly what I want to do, but it certainly interests me to see what he does with it.

EATING MOTHER

JG: Have readers ever read things into your book which you'd never thought were there?

RC: Yes, I'm sure that's true, but I

can't think of one specific instance, though I can certainly, on the other hand, think of instances of patterns or meanings turning up in the books which I didn't plan to be there. One very strange example is in *The Doll Who Ate His Mother*. The guy who is the monster, who's created partly by religious intolerance, is called Christopher which the book says is specifically meant to recall the name of Christ, he's looked after by a woman called Mary who's not his mother. He's the product of an unnatural birth and he's sent off to St Joseph's to learn religion.

Now, that sounds too obvious and too conscious to be anything but a rather obvious, contrived, bit of religious symbolism, but I never realised it was there until I saw it. Things like that happen all the time. I find this a very positive aspect of horror fiction. As a writer you can allow the subconscious to talk without intervention. If you get on with telling the story then it's amazing the amount of other stuff which will shape itself without you noticing it. It's one of the things I most enjoy about writing.

JG: Would you agree that writers who are influenced by other authors, like you are by Lovecraft and Machen, tend to outgrow their influences or do you think that's a form of egotism?

RC: I don't think it's so much going away from it as subsuming it, making it part of yourself and taking what you want to use from it. There's still a lot of Lovecraftian structure in my stories, and occasionally I've tried very consciously to do it. *Voice On The Beach* was an attempt to do a pure Lovecraftian story and I think that *The Hungry Moon* has a lot in common with Lovecraft, although there are lots of things in it which clearly are not the way Lovecraft would have done it.

So, I'm trying to approach Lovecraftian themes, perhaps, in my own way, but I wouldn't want to say that I'd outgrown my influences, I don't think you do. In the novel I'm writing now, *Ancient Images*, there's a considerable amount of MR James. There's a bit in East Anglia with somebody running off along a cliff being pursued by something not yet specified, though specified later on.

I'm not saying I'm always conscious of my influences. There are things that people point out where I think 'yes, that is where it came from'.

I think that the single greatest influence after Lovecraft for me would be Fritz Leiber. If I hadn't read *Night's Black Agents* you'd never have read *Demons By Daylight*. That pointed me in the

direction of doing supernatural horror which grows out of real, urban, landscapes.

DIVING INTO THE LAKE

JG: Is there anything wrong in using strictly translated influences, not exactly in a plagiaristic way but . . .

RC: No. It's imitation, using a found structure to build your own structure on top of it to develop something new. There's nothing wrong in that. Just imagine if this were music. Nobody says 'look at Rachmaninov, writing a set of variations of Paganini, ripping off poor old Paganini, can't even think of a tune of his own'. Nobody's going to say that and I don't see why it should be said in terms of fiction either.

Again, Lovecraft is the classic example. He encouraged people to use the structure that he built up. It's a pity in some way that that rubbed off on me and I started filling in all the gaps which he left to deliberately appeal to your imagination, but no, I don't think there's anything wrong with imitation at all, theoretically. What ultimately matters is what happens in the final book, not where it necessarily came from.

JG: Could you pinpoint where you think the change occurred in the horror genre since you wrote your first short story?

RC: We're talking about 25 years here, so I'm letting myself off the hook, now that I don't have to go for the three separate changes. The crucial change is around the late-Sixties – early-Seventies, where horror fiction, which was an extremely puritanical field in many ways, suddenly began to admit all manner of things about human nature which it wouldn't previously have done.

I suppose I could best talk about this in my own, personal, terms because when I wrote *Demons By Daylight*, and I had people actually sleeping together, I had people thinking about their own sexuality. I finished that book and I thought, Derleth (*Campbell's first publisher*) will never touch this, Arkam House will never publish this. He'd actually taken a couple of four-letter words out of *The Inhabitant Of The Lake*; they didn't fit in there, the middle of a Lovecraft pastiche. But, *Demons By Daylight* was clearly a whole different thing. What I'd been vaguely wandering toward doing in *The Inhabitant* . . . I went straight in for in *Demons*.

NEXT ISSUE: Ramsey Campbell talks about the recent development of his work, the horror genre in the Seventies, and his next book, *Ancient Images*.

"The best horror fiction seems to astonish as well as simply send you cowering off into a corner."



eye of child

The teacher gazed at Mary's painting, at the hair like a blue rag and the lopsided splotchy mouth, the right leg longer than the other. Behind her Donna had grown tired of being a model, and was making faces. At the back of the class Tommy was whining "Please Miss, please Miss." Beyond the windows the tenements blazed like the seaside beneath floating ice-cream clouds.

"I'm disappointed in you, Mary," the teacher said.

Mary's legs drew up beneath her seat as though she had a stomach ache. "We all know you've got plenty of imagination," the teacher said, "but I told you to paint Donna, not what's inside your head."

"But Miss -"

"Pardon?"

"Mary flinched visibly. "But Mrs Tweedle," she said, and the teacher glared at the class to suppress any outburst of giggles like farting. She acted like an old woman sometimes, though she wasn't quite -



BY RAMSEY CAMPBELL

probably no older than thirty. "Miss Dix said we shouldn't listen to what other people said was right," Mary said, "only paint until we liked what we'd done."

"I'm not in the least interested. This is my classroom now, not hers." She returned to Mary's painting. "Just think about what you're doing. Can you imagine someone who looked like that actually walking about? How do you think they would look?"

"Like Mr Waddicar."

Again the teacher glared about to head off giggles. "You aren't nearly as clever as you think you are, Mary. Just try to put your cleverness to some use."

She hardly glanced at Karen's picture. "Maybe your glasses need changing," she said sarcastically. When she moved on, Karen thought Mary was trembling. Mary had rather deserved to be told off, for thinking herself so superior—but it was partly the teacher's fault for making Mary her favourite. On the whole Karen

felt sorer for Mary than the others did. Someone had to sit next to her, after all.

"Oh no," the teacher said angrily behind her. Tommy, forgetting that she refused to answer to Miss, had concluded that she wouldn't let him leave the room. "Well, don't look at me, I can't do anything," she cried. "Go and clean yourself up and get a mop." He was hobbling out when the bell rang. Donna jumped up with a loud sigh of relief. Mary was gazing wistfully at her picture. "Can't we put them up?"

"You can do whatever you like with them. Go out as soon as you've finished," the teacher hurried away to her lunch, leaving them to climb on chairs.

When they'd stuck up the paintings, which made the room less like a chalky concrete box, they ran downstairs. Mr Waddicar the caretaker was hobbling across the landing, like an old lollipop man frustrating traffic. They tried not to giggle as they remembered Mary's remark.

The yard was full of interweaving independent games. A few panting children defended a narrow strip of shade beside the school. Cloud shadows tried to creep the length of the street, but were swept away by the sun. The four-storey tenements, layer on layer of them dwindling toward the horizon, had swallowed their own shadows and looked thirsty for more.

A man was pacing outside the bars, having helped Miss Floyd to chase away a gang of four-year-olds who had been throwing things into the yard. "That's Mr Tweedle," Mary said.

Several of the others broke into a chorus of "Tweedle Tweedle" until giggling choked them. "Well, it isn't, see," Donna said. "He's just a man. My Mam says she used to be married to someone, that's why she's a Mrs."

Just then the teacher emerged from the school, her large earrings glinting like thin bangles. They could smell her dry perfume from yards away. Mary ran over. "Mrs Tweedle!"

The teacher pulled her hand away, frowning at a smear of paint. Though Mary's gentle smile wavered, she blurted out. "Is he your husband?"

Don't you dare speak to me like that, child. Just remember who you're talking to." With that she stalked out of the yard.

Karen had to say "S'allright," for Mary was trembling again. Perhaps more than the rebuff had upset her: she seemed always to need to seize people's names at once, perhaps for reassurance, just as she'd grabbed the teacher's hand. But she didn't want Karen's reassurance now, for she turned her back, furious that anyone had seen her upset.

The teacher didn't help. All afternoon, as the chalk dust grew steeped in perfume, Mary kept taking her stories up to her for praise. Miss Dix wouldn't have minded; she'd used to let anyone cling to her, as though she was their mother. The more impatient the teacher became, the more Mary pestered her. Karen didn't see what the teacher had to be impatient about, for she was only crunching peppermints to hide the smell of beer and looking at a big book of paintings, just splodges of colour, no drawing at all.

Eventually she said "Look, Mary, you aren't the only child here. In the time you waste bringing this to me you could be thinking up something new."

This time Mary didn't begin shaking. She sat quietly and drew in her exercise book, though they weren't what Karen would have called drawings: spirals that wound tightly inward until they merged into lumps of black, jagged lines that came scratching outward. Wherever Mary was gazing, it wasn't at the page.

But she'd thought of something new. When they left the school she said "Let's follow her."

The teacher was walking beside the tenements with the man who wasn't her husband. It might be fun to hear what they were saying. Karen ran after Mary into the nearest tenement entry, and upstairs.



RAMSEY CAMPBELL is the grandmaster of British horror fiction. Now in his early-40s, he has influenced the work and growth of writers such as Stephen King and Clive Barker. His stylistic power is immediately obvious in his novels *The Hungry Moon* and *The Influence*, so fans are in for a treat when his next novel, *Ancient Images*, is published next year. Read part 1 of our exclusive interview with him on page 48.

Beyond the windows the tenements blazed like the seaside . . .

Crushed beer cans huddled in the corners of steps. The children raced past them, onto the balcony. Front doors gleamed like plastic, identical windows glared out over the concrete wall. Figures stood beneath gathered net curtains: glass animals, a wooden toreador. Graffiti made stairwells resemble bad porous skin, tattooed. Their running feet sounded like a downpour within the close walls, until Mary hushed her.

"Look at this place," the teacher was saying, "It's no wonder they don't want to learn. That has to be the reason, hasn't it? Ten years old – eleven, some of them – and already their heads are full of cotton wool and last night's telly."

Mary looked tempted to reply, but the teacher was chattering on. "Why do they build places like this? I thought they must all have been pulled down yonks ago. I just can't understand why the authority sent me here. My teaching practice was at a lovely school, with lovely kids and all the aids you could think of. I felt I was doing something. But here half of them can't do arithmetic, some of them can hardly read. I have to repeat things over and over, and I can't stand that. And even when –"

After a pause, perhaps amazed that he could get a word in, the man said "What's the matter?"

"Don't start that again." She sounded as angry as Mary had been when she'd let her feelings show. "My nerves are perfectly all right now, I've told you."

"Perhaps working here doesn't agree with you."

"Perhaps you're right, but that's just tough tit. I'm going to do my year here, otherwise they'll say I wasn't able to keep the job." Irritably she said "I'm all right. I just thought for a moment that we were being watched."

Karen froze, choking down a gasp. Mary didn't move, except for a smile that crept across her mouth. "Nothing excites them," the teacher was complaining, "not even art. I spent half yesterday showing them how to sketch and paint, and what do they give me today? The same old chimpanzee pictures. There's one girl, Mary, who really frustrated me. She wasn't trying, that's what I can't understand. None of them – Jesus!"

There came a rush of scampering. Karen risked a glance over the balcony wall. The gang of four-year-olds had pounced from an entry and were running away, yelling and making faces. Their faces already looked like masks, made up of dirt and paint and food.

"See what I mean," the teacher said tightly. "They're all the same. They'll grow up just like the class I have to teach."

When she moved out of earshot, Mary didn't follow. She was squatting in a corner of the balcony, knees drawn up to her chest, as though clutching to herself the things she'd heard the teacher say. Her smile grew wider, and less like a smile. "I know something we can do," she said.

Karen didn't like her smile, nor her eyes, which were blank as the eyes of a painting. Nevertheless she had to follow, ducking beneath washing like breathless sails, since Mary's was on her way home. Mary was silent. If she spoke, perhaps her smile would crack.

Like the rest of the flats, Mary's had a view like a mirror maze. Beyond the window, a screen whose net curtains looked poised to fall, Karen heard voices. Beyond the front door which blazed like a brake light and the inevitable hall the size of a telephone kiosk, a bicycle bent almost double under the stairs.

When Mary saw the bicycle, her face pinched like an old woman's. Then she remembered what she planned to do, or that she mustn't let Karen see her feelings. Snubbing the bicycle, she crept to a cupboard beneath the stairs.

She had just opened the cupboard when her mother called: "Is that you, Mary? Uncle Ron's here."

"Oh, all right." Her face pinched again as she rummaged in the cupboard, which was full of library books whose labels had been torn out. She was struggling with a large black book which was the foundation of two stacks. As she dragged it free – its unhinged covers staggering, scattering loose pages which displayed lists like recipes and a picture of a woman in a pointed hat surrounded by small lumpy creatures – the living room door was snatched open. "What are you hanging about here for?" a man said.

He must be Uncle Ron, for the cuffs of his overalls were still manacled by cycle clips. Within a frame of stubble his lips were smeared with pink lipstick. "Who said you could read that?"

Before Mary could answer, he snarled "What are you showing them to her for?!" he'd noticed Karen. "You just forget you saw any books."

Mary was taking advantage of the diversion to sneak away to her room. "You come back here with that," he said.

"Uncle Jack lets me read them."

"Never mind Uncle Jack. I'm your uncle now. I'll give you Uncle Jack if you don't bring that here." He banged on the living room door. "Why do you let her read this muck? Witches and bloody magic. I don't know what you wanted with it anyway – you don't even read half of them. Why don't you give her something decent if she wants to read? Don't you care how she grows up?"

"She's always in some book or other," her mother's disembodied voice complained. "Thinks more of them than she does of me. Rather have fairy stories than her own mother."

"Give it here." Before Mary could move, he pulled the book out of her hands and hit her across the forehead with it. "And you just be on your way," he told Karen, jerking his thumb at the door.

"See you tomorrow, Mary." But Mary was neither listening nor registering pain. Her blank eyes were watching where he replaced the book.

Graffiti made stairwells resemble bad porous skin, tattooed.



Mary stood behind the teacher's desk and closing her eyes, brought the matchbox close to her face. Now Karen knew she was unnervingly serious, for she didn't react to the stench at all, though the mixture of that smell with perfume and chalk dust made Karen feel dry-mouthed and sick. Squeezing her eyes so tightly shut that they looked like senile lips, Mary began to gabble.

Was she making it up? It didn't sound like a language to Karen. If she'd learned it from the book in the cupboard she must have done so overnight. Surely there was a good chance that she'd got it wrong – yet she sounded fiercely convinced that it would work. Chalk dust sank through the tainted air, the paintings became still on the walls, and in the midst of her gabbling Mary said "Mrs Tweedle."

Her puckered eyes opened and glared at Karen, who stammered "Mrs Tweedle." In a few moments she had to say it again, her words stumbling after Mary's. It was almost like a nonsense song, but Karen wasn't at all inclined to giggle, for the stench was thickening, overpower the perfume, while the room had grown oppressively still. The air tasted parched with chalk. She didn't like the way all the paintings seemed to be looking at her, particularly since in several of the paintings the eyes weren't the same size. Their colours seemed violent as neon. Those figures whose legs were unequal – which was most of them – looked caught in the act of moving.

Suddenly, over Mary's gabbling, Karen heard an ominous yet welcome sound. Mr Waddicar was hobbling along the corridor. Now Mary would have to stop, or they would be found out. Whoever was crossing the yard toward the school might see her too. Karen glanced toward the window, and at once her tongue felt like a gag. How could Mr Waddicar be limping doggedly along the corridor when she could see him outside in the yard?

She managed to speak. "I'm going," she said, too loudly. Mary's furious stare couldn't make her stay. Perhaps the corridor might do so, for though it was sunlit and bare, its linoleum stained by chalky reflections of the walls, it was very long. She ran down it, keeping to the far side from the classroom doors, were all of the footsteps her echoes, or were some of them hobbling? She ran past the classroom, where a coat dangled its handleless arms from a metal sketch of shoulders, and out.

Before she'd gone far, Mary emerged from the school, looking murderous. Karen had spoiled her game. Karen hoped that was the end of it, especially

since she dreamed that night of a corridor whose ends were sealed. As she ran desperately along it, back and forth, she heard things in the classrooms, struggling to open the doors with their half-formed hands.

If possible, the following day was even hotter. The sky was blinding as steam, pierced by the sun. The tenements looked carved from chalk. In the distance, everything quivered; thin streams of water pretended to lie across the roads. Surely Karen was safe from her fears on a day like this – and yet something was wrong.

The teacher was nervous. Everything seemed to disturb her: muttering at the back of the class where she couldn't see who it was, confused echoes of running in the corridor, the sleepy flapping of the paintings on the walls. Was she unnerved by the way Mary kept staring at her, or by the faint dead stench? Was the stench coming from the airline bag, or clinging to the room?

Perhaps she was nervous of something else entirely, for when they returned to class that afternoon, a man was sitting at the back of the room.

Karen knew what he was. He was going to watch the teacher to see if she was any good. No wonder the teacher had been nervous, and she was growing worse. Standing stiffly in front of the blackboard and breaking pieces of chalk as she wrote, she addressed them as slowly and clearly as if they were deaf. Her smile dared them not to understand.

Of course she only made them nervous too. When she asked Karen a question, even though Karen knew the answer her mind immediately went blank. Her mouth gaped, her skin felt acrawl with chalk. The teacher was growing irritable; one of her fingers snapped, but it was a stick of chalk; she called the twins by each other's names, as though to get her own back for being called Miss. All at once her eyes gleamed rather desperately. "Mary," she said.

Mary must be her last hope – but Mary had been in an odd mood all day, virtually ignoring Karen and everyone else, pretending to work while she listened for something. Now she stared blankly at the teacher.

"Didn't you hear the question?"

"Yes." There was a further pause. "I don't know."

"Of course you do. It's simple. Don't tell me you of all people don't know." Her voice was threatening to shrill. "Just think, for heaven's sake," she said.

Couldn't she sense Mary's hatred? "I don't know," Mary said resentfully, and refused to say anything more.

The teacher was glaring as though Mary had deliberately betrayed her; she couldn't know how furious Mary was at having been shown up in front of the man. After class Karen hurried away before Mary could detain her. When she saw Mary loitering near the cloakrooms, waiting to sneak back into the classroom, she knew she'd been right to do so.

At the gate of the yard she looked back. The man was talking to the teacher, who looked chastened, perhaps even ashamed. As Karen watched, they left the classroom. When she reached the tenement balcony she glanced back again and saw Mary standing alone by the teacher's desk, head bowed over an object in her hands. Karen couldn't see much at that distance; even the paintings on the walls looked like blank paper.

That night she couldn't sleep. The heat was so oppressive that it felt solid. Whenever she closed her eyes, part of it came hobbling toward her. At last, despite the muttering and turning of her sisters, she slept intermittently, but felt as though she hadn't.

Morning brought no relief from the heat. The sky was a whitish blur in which the sun was indistinguishable, perhaps because the entire sky was white-hot. People trudged to work or to school, fanning themselves and blowing. On the way to school she met Mary, who looked uneasy but determined – to

Morning brought no relief to the heat.

face what? She made Karen reluctant to go into the classroom, not only because it felt like a greenhouse. The walls trapped the heat and reflected it back. They were bare. All the paintings were gone.

Had Mary torn them down last night, enraged that Karen wouldn't help her? Or had the teacher done so after she'd been told off by the man? Karen didn't think it could have been the teacher, for she seemed to have changed overnight for the better: she encouraged instead of demanding, she made a visible effort to get the twins' names right, when she repeated something and the children didn't understand she didn't grow irritable, only popped a capsule into her mouth and started again. Even though Karen realised she had to do what the man had told her, the teacher's behaviour looked like an apology to the class.

She was especially gentle with Mary. "This afternoon," she said, and though she meant all of them she was looking at Mary, "I want you to paint what you like. Show me what you like." The girl stared resentfully at her, then looked away.

Karen thought that Mary was being unreasonable. The teacher was trying to be kind – why couldn't she give her a chance? Besides, Mary's sullen muteness had begun to annoy Karen. As soon as they reached the schoolyard at lunchtime she demanded "Did you pull down all the paintings?"

"No. Don't be stupid." For a moment her feelings glared through. She wished Karen hadn't asked her that, hadn't reminded her of something she'd done that she regretted now. She started nervously at a glimpse of the four-year-olds dodging behind the school. That was who it must have been, for their faces were messily multicoloured.

Heat haze seemed to coat Karen's glasses. she felt too limp to join in any of the games. She was glad when lunchtime was over; at least she would have to do something in class. Mary was still nervous, for she drew back from the classroom door, staring at the hand with which she'd opened it. Someone who'd forgotten to wash their hands after painting must have touched the knob.

The teacher had brought them some special paints, in tubes which she took from her bag. Karen painted the sun in a whiter sky over green fields, and tried to make the trees luminous too, balls of fire instead of foliage. "That's very good, Karen," the teacher said, sounding surprised. Somewhere in the school Mr. Waddicar was hobbling. Was someone hobbling alongside him, or were they echoes?

Mary painted someone running. Karen couldn't tell if the figure was meant to be chasing someone or running away; its face was a pink blob, as though Mary didn't want to fill it in. The teacher seemed puzzled too, but impressed. "That's very expressive, Mary." It couldn't be Mr Waddicar in the corridors, for the footsteps were too numerous. It must be children, hobbling worse than him.

The sky was darkening. Unbroken clouds pressed heat into the room. When the teacher switched on the fluorescent lights, the paints glared, uncomfortably vivid. Karen felt trapped by the colours. Without warning, Mary, who had begun to tremble, dug her brush into a well of black paint and blotted out her picture. What would the teacher say to her? Nothing: before she'd returned to the front of the class and Mary's desk, the bell rang.

"I'll see you all on Monday," the teacher said, hurrying away. Mary seemed about to run after her – to tell her something, or to walk along with her? Perhaps she was afraid to do either. Through the window Karen could just make out the gang of four-year-olds lying in wait beyond the railings. Distance and haze obscured their messy faces.

When she emerged from the school, they'd gone. The sky was withholding its rain. She watched the teacher hurrying alone beside the tenements, which

looked harsh as lime. Karen felt irritable; she was growing as bad as Mary, glancing at the balconies and entries. Why should the glimpses of colours worry her? Her mother was always saying that the estate needed brightening up. It was only that the dark sky made them look ominous, and that Karen couldn't quite catch sight of them directly.

All at once it began to rain, drops large as gobs of spit. She would never reach the tenements without getting drenched. She sheltered in the school doorway, and wished she was standing with someone other than Mary.

The teacher had dodged into the tenements. For a moment Karen felt resentfully nervous: where did she think she was going? Of course, she was going to make her way across the estate under cover. A minute later she reappeared on a first-floor balcony. Only the top half of her body was visible, and she resembled a moving target on a shooting gallery.

Mary was watching with a kind of agonised fascination. Karen thought she knew what Mary was waiting for – she refused to believe it could be anything else – she wished they'd get it over with. Oblivious, the teacher hurried along the chalky balconies beneath the leaden sky.

She'd crossed three balconies when they appeared from a dark stairway. Karen could just see their small heads, pouncing from the darkness. Yes, they were the gang of four-year-olds, for she could see how blotchily multicoloured their faces were. It must be the rain on her glasses which made their movements look so jerky, and their faces appear to be running, spreading, dripping.

She had only just noticed how silent they were when the teacher screamed and all at once was gone. Then she could only stand in the school doorway, unable to think what to do until Mary began to trudge toward the tenements.

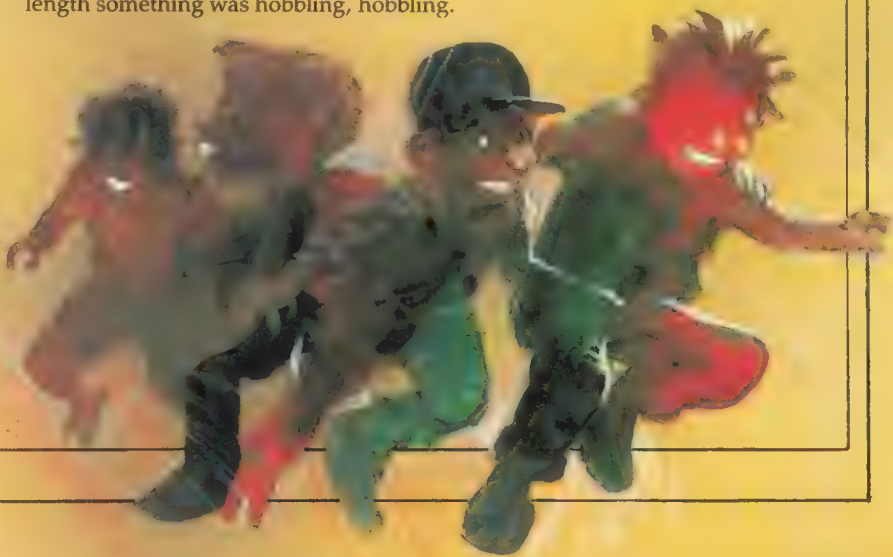
That was almost the end of the summer term, and the holidays gave Karen a chance to forget. The new motherly teacher, Mrs Castell, was clearly anxious to help her. But she hadn't seen anything very horrible, only the teacher lying at the foot of the tenement stairs; it hadn't been apparent that her neck was broken. The walls had been covered with fresh paint, no doubt by vandals, and the teacher's face had been smeared with colours like messy kisses. They must have come from the tubes of paint in her bag.

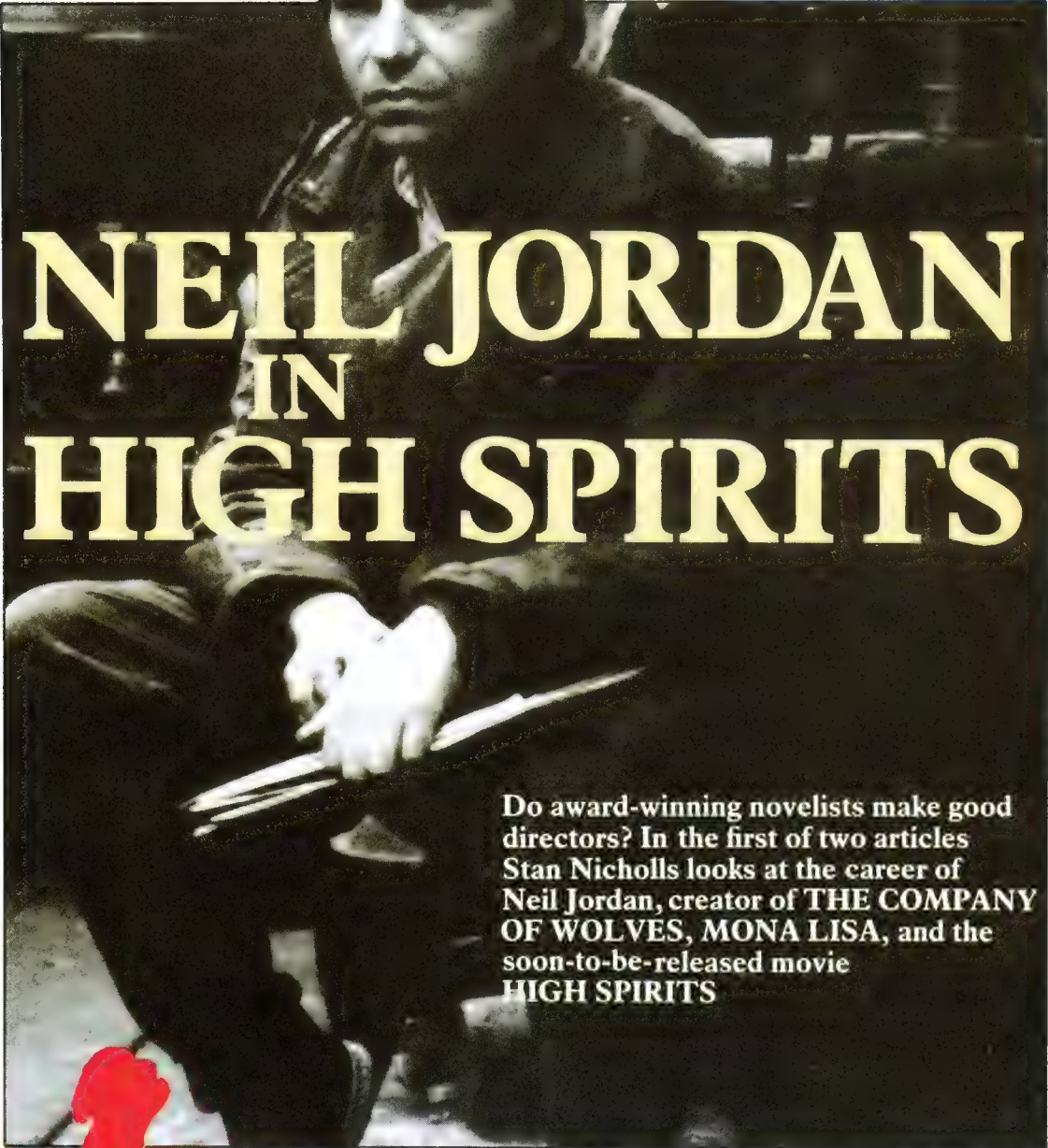
Was Mary unable to forget? She was still very nervous, though Mrs. Castell knew to make a fuss of her. She was shivering at the noise in the corridor. "It's all right," Karen said. "It's only Mr Waddicar."

Mrs Castell looked dismayed, angry with herself for not having spoken sooner. "I'm sorry, Karen, Mr Waddicar died during the holidays."

Now Mary was shivering in earnest, and Karen felt in danger of doing so too. The nights were growing darker, the corridor was very long, and far down its length something was hobbling, hobbling.

All at once it began to rain, drops as large as gobs of spit.





NEIL JORDAN IN HIGH SPIRITS

Do award-winning novelists make good directors? In the first of two articles Stan Nicholls looks at the career of Neil Jordan, creator of *THE COMPANY OF WOLVES*, *MONA LISA*, and the soon-to-be-released movie *HIGH SPIRITS*

"Every novelist wants to direct films, they envy film makers a medium more coherent, more multifaceted than their own."

Neil Jordan's increasing reputation as one of the Eighties' most innovative young film directors – he was born in 1950 in Sligo – has its origins in the career he established in the previous decade as an author. In the mid-Seventies he helped found the Irish Writer's Cooperative, and his collection *Night in Tunisia* won the 1979 *Guardian* Fiction Prize – the title story was named after a Charley Parker number, reflecting Jordan's passion for music.

His short stories, and novels *The Past* (1980) and *Dream Beasts* (1983) were held to be major contributions to the Irish literary tradition and display a remarkable imaginative vision, with a brevity which proved invaluable in his later career as a screenwriter.

'I think every novelist wants to direct films,' he says. 'They envy – I don't know why really – film makers a medium that is more coherent, more multifaceted than their own. That's what I thought anyway, when I was writing novels.'

He submitted plays to radio and television, with variable success, and saw his screenplay *Travellers* independently made, although the result disappointed him. Then another script found its way to director John Boorman. 'He wanted to produce it, to put some money in to it,' Jordan recalls. As with so many embryonic film projects, it came to nothing. 'We wrote another script together, which also wasn't made, and then John started *Excalibur*,' – a priceless introduction to the realities of film production. 'It was very generous of him, and very good for me. Until then, my only relationship with

films was my affection for them.'

John Boorman also played an important part, as executive producer, when Jordan directed his first feature, *Angel*, in 1982. From his own screenplay, and financed by Channel 4 and the Irish Film Board, it was brought in on a modest budget of under £500,000. It has the distinction of being Ireland's first full-scale fiction movie, and gained him the *London Evening Standard*'s Most Promising Newcomer Award. It was an impressive debut, placing Jordan in the forefront of the emerging new wave of a revitalised British film industry. An uncompromising thriller set in Northern Ireland, its protagonist is a young musician, Danny (Stephen Rea) who witnesses a terrorist killing at a dance hall in South Armagh. His subsequent quest, of inquiry and revenge, nearly proves fatal to him.

"I didn't have a clue. I presumed you shot what you saw on the screen, so I shot what I wanted to see."



"Surrounded by artificial sets and a cast of villagers, wolves, snakes and spiders, the thought of doing a film with actors in real locations was tempting."



Previous page: Neil Jordan reflecting on *The Company Of Wolves*. This page, top: Micha Bergese transforms into a wolf. Below: Tony Rohr and Stephen Rea take a walk on the windy side in *Angel*. Below left: Angela Lansbury takes direction from Neil Jordan in *The Company Of Wolves*. Right: Stephen Rea and Honor Heffernan play the blues – *Angel*. Bottom: Bob Hoskins, Michael Caine and Cathy Tyson make a triangle in *Mana Lisa*. Opposite page: Sarah Patterson as Rosaleen – *The Company Of Wolves*



AN ANGEL AT HEART

Angel is not an overtly political film yet it finds the heart of Ireland's tragedy as surely as a sniper's bullet. Some critics saw it as a film noir, in the tradition of Chandler and Dashiell Hammett – a view partially supported by cameraman Chris Menges's starkly lit set-ups – and while there is truth in this, its strength really lies in its mythic quality. Already, Jordan was making 'fairy tales' for adults, an approach characterising all his later work.

Danny, like the hero of *Night in Tunisia* – and Jordan himself – is a saxophone player, and to that extent the film possibly has an autobiographical strain. It also has confidence, a willingness to take risks – not least in Jordan's insistence on casting unknown Honor Heffernan in a leading role – and a quintessential Irishness befitting its status as that country's first 35mm feature.

Angel is not only audacious but ambiguous. We are left to make up our own minds who is the angel of death. That the film is an allegory of corruption seems to be borne out when Heffernan's character says: 'Men start out as angels and end up as brutes'.

Being pitched into a full-length movie was a sink or swim experience: 'I didn't have a clue. I didn't even know you were meant to say 'action!',' Jordan later admitted. 'I presumed you shot what you saw on the screen, so I just shot what I wanted to see on the screen, which led to certain problems in the editing, but in some ways leads to a far more coherent series of images.'

HAIR OF THE WOLF

The Company Of Wolves, his second feature – and first for the ubiquitous Palace Productions – appeared in 1984, and is as unique as *Angel*, while being completely different. The most interesting and offbeat fantasy film of the Eighties, it is certainly in a tradition; a British tradition – unlike *Angel* – of eccentricity and quirkiness, embracing such diverse works as *Dead Of Night*, Korda's *Thief Of Bagdad* and, arguably, the films of Powell and Pressburger. Although in the last analysis the picture is truly uncategorisable.

A collaboration with fabulist Angela Carter, worked up from an 11-page story in her collection *The Bloody Chamber*, *Company Of Wolves*'s non-linear narrative is potent, highly erotic and often disturbing; a dream-like quality pervades all Jordan's work. *Company Of Wolves* is a dream of a movie – sometimes a nightmare – an invitation to surrender to the darkside in the face of an

increasingly materialistic world. Jordan himself described it as 'deeply irrational', and its general air of unreality is enhanced by its studio-bound sets and non-naturalistic lighting.

A retelling of the Little Red Riding Hood story, along with elements of Beauty and the Beast and other folk legends, it is a series of tales within a tale, related via dreams and outlandish wolflore, told with relish by grandma – Angela Lansbury – who imparts such gems of wisdom as: 'Never trust a man whose eyebrows meet in the middle'. On one level it is a rite of passage, the coming to sexual maturity of 13-year-old Rosaleen – an extremely able performance from newcomer Sarah Patterson, herself 13 when the film was made. As Neil Jordan said at the time: 'I wanted the film drenched in sensuality.'

Shot for around £2.25 million, and utilising three sound stages at Shepperton, the production designer was Anton Furst, creator of the monster's eggs in *Alien* and whose previous experience, as a film editor, included work for Stanley Kubrick and Nicholas Roeg. He built the film's key set, a brooding and fantastical forest, at once surreal, phallic and menacing. Christopher Tucker – with credits on *Star Wars*, *The Elephant Man*, *Quest For Fire*, *Krull*, and *Dune* – handled special effects and make-up.

Working with real wolves was probably the most difficult part of the production – at one point a wolf was turned on by its fellows and eaten. They cannot really be trained, and as keeping them segregated proved impractical, they were allowed to walk more or less freely amongst the cast. One of the film's more memorable moments has a wedding party, hexed by a disgruntled witch, metamorphosing into wolves. The animals were sedated and dressed in the guests' clothes, the idea being that as they awoke they could reasonably be expected to shred their way out of the costumes. Twelve hours later, the wolves having done no more than occasionally stretch in their sleep, the crew gave up. Eventually another way was found to shoot the sequence.

'The *Company Of Wolves* was to be about sex, not about hating it,' Jordan contended. 'The film's basis is sensuality – Little Red Riding Hood played out as a seduction.'

He, and Angela Carter, stated they made the picture with a teenage audience in mind. The French censors were quite liberal when they came to classify it, but their Irish and English counterparts took a different view, missing the film's essential moral

impetus, and imposed an 18 certificate.

'What they are saying,' Jordan commented, 'is that fairy tales are not fit for children.' Unlike *Angel*, which had not found an American distributor at that time, *Company Of Wolves* had its world premiere in Los Angeles and went on to do well in the States.

LONDON LOWLIFE

The idea for *Mona Lisa* (1986), part-financed by George Harrison's Handmade company, was conceived while working on *Company Of Wolves*. 'Surrounded by artificial sets, massive special effects and a cast of medieval villagers, wolves, snakes and spiders all in a polystyrene forest, the thought of doing a film with actors in real locations was tempting.'

Inspired by a newspaper story about a criminal brought to court accused of assaulting a pimp, the early drafts of the script were co-written with London screenwriter David Leland. 'Only when I had met and cast Bob Hoskins did the [central] character really take shape and could I proceed with the final drafts,' Jordan says.

'The thought of a story set in London, a city that has all too rarely been filmed with any sense of style, set in today's underworld, and the moral chaos that goes with it... was the initial attraction. Being Irish, but having worked in London over a period of years, the city has always had a sense of mystery and seduction for me.'

In *Mona Lisa*, George (Bob Hoskins) is released after seven years in prison to a hostile reception, not least from his wife, who turns him away. Gang boss Mortwell (Michael Caine) owes George for his time inside, and offers him a job chauffeuring beautiful black prostitute Simone (Cathy Tyson) to liaisons with her wealthy clients. George is at first hostile toward her, but his feelings turn to affection – which she seems to return – and then to love. But her response to this is uncertain.

As with *Angel*, there is a quest element. Simone is obsessed with finding a drug-addicted hooker, Cathy, who she once worked the streets with, and who is now being exploited by the same pimp, Anderson. Simone had previously escaped. This leads the pair into violent confrontations with various hoodlums and, ultimately, each other.

It is a love story, although a 'very odd' one, according to Jordan. Certainly they are a mismatched couple – she elegant and sophisticated, Eighties streetwise and cynical; he old fashioned, honourable and basically

softhearted. In fact, George's idea of a compliment is to say of Simone, 'She may be a thick black tart, but she's still a fucking lady'.

Jordan saw *Mona Lisa* as a moral tale, and was anxious to avoid the trap of making London's seamy underworld appear attractive. While researching the film he talked to a number of prostitutes, and found little glamour and a lot of pathos in what they had to tell him. The character embodying the capital's lowlife perfection is Mortwell. 'For the final character, the heart of darkness with whom the story ends,' Jordan says, 'I needed someone of great power, who could suggest a world of evil through an immaculate exterior. Michael Caine was the obvious and only choice.'

Mona Lisa, Jordan's most commercial film to date, was a success in America, and smashed the box-office record at London's Odeon Haymarket, taking £53,222 in its first seven days. It brought Bob Hoskins international stardom and the Best Actor Award at Cannes.

FUTURE FILMS

October 1988 sees the release of Neil Jordan's latest film, *High Spirits*, a supernatural comedy. It stars Peter O'Toole and Daryl Hannah and is about an Irish nobleman who sells his castle to two businessmen who portray the place as a haunted hotel to attract American tourists.

It is Jordan's most ambitious film so far and, if successful, will place him firmly in the mainstream of world cinema. He has returned to Ireland to shoot it – 'I spent a lot of time with casting director Susie Figgis going round in search of younger actors to play the staff of the castle. They need this sense of wryness and irony. My problem is that the theatre in Ireland is booming at the moment and some of the actors I wanted I couldn't get.'

He has a tip for aspiring film directors: 'The ways people get to direct films have changed and there are very few people now who work their way up through the floor. The easiest way, it seems to me, is writing, because if you've written a script you can angle your way into directing it. After all, if they like your script and want it made you can hang on until they let you do it.'

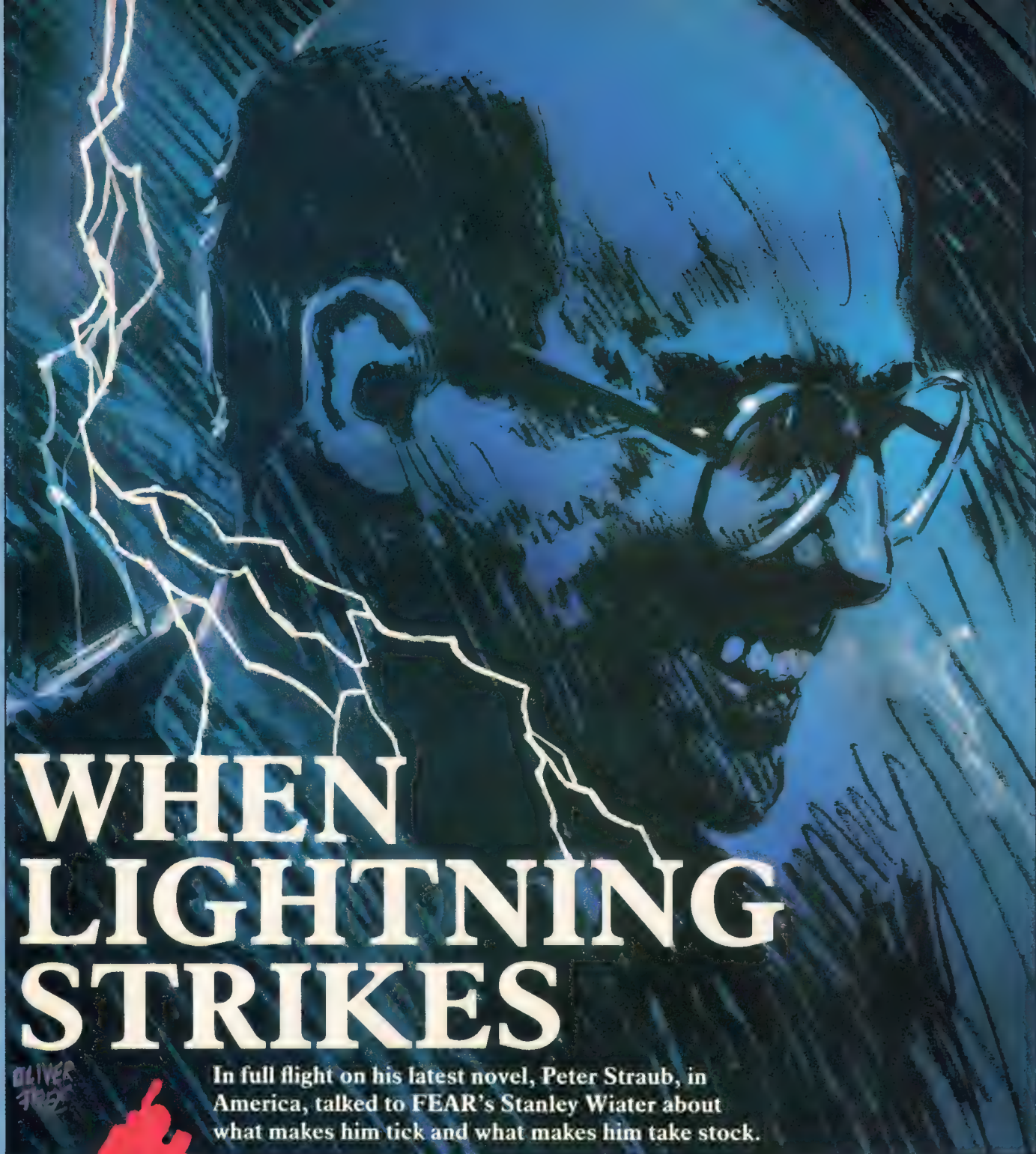
Watching Neil Jordan 'do it' is one of the more interesting phenomena on the current British film scene.

Next Issue: Neil Jordan tells FEAR about the resurgence in the British film and about the making of his new film *High Spirits*.



"... if you've written a script you can angle your way into directing it."

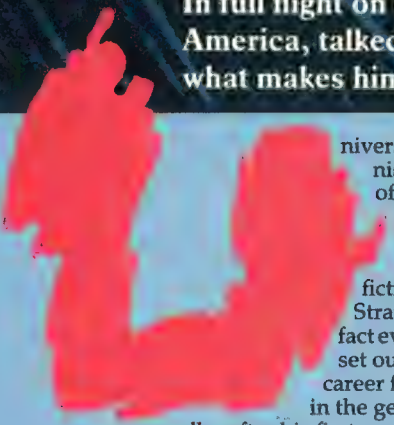




WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES

OLIVER
TREV

In full flight on his latest novel, Peter Straub, in America, talked to FEAR's Stanley Wiater about what makes him tick and what makes him take stock.



Universally recognised as one of the masters of contemporary horror fiction, Peter Straub did not in fact ever purposely set out to make a career for himself in the genre. Actually,

after his first novel, *Marriages* (1973), sank out of sight and his second mainstream novel had been rejected, he was pretty much at a loss as to what to write next. He was then living in England. His agent at the time suggested he try his hand at something in a more commercial genre – perhaps even a ‘Gothic thriller’. So in 1975 Straub wrote *Julia* – filmed in 1977 as *Full*

Circle – which was followed by another supernatural novel, *If You Could See Me Now*, in 1977.

Encouraged by their success, Straub tried once again in the burgeoning horror genre. Two years later he hit the jackpot when *Ghost Story* – which was also made into a motion picture – entered the *New York Times* bestsellers list and sold several million copies worldwide.

Needless to say, Straub has long since never had to worry about having a novel rejected again. Since that time, the novels *Shadowland* (1980) and *Floating Dragon* (1983) have also become major critical and popular successes. Then, with his good friend Stephen King, he collaborated on *The Talisman*, which in 1984 became the fastest-selling hardcover novel in publishing history – with more than a mil-

lion copies in print. No less a talent than Steven Spielberg is developing their epic fantasy into a major motion picture. But in the past few years, little has been heard from Straub regarding his current projects. I spoke to him recently as he finished work on his latest, and much-anticipated, novel.

THE KOKO NUT

SW: Could you tell us about the novel you’ve recently completed, which is simply titled *Koko*?

PS: *Koko* is a thriller about Vietnam veterans – there’s a psychopathic killer who comes in at the middle of the book who calls himself Koko for reasons nobody can figure out until the end. A good part of the book is simply about the aftertaste of Vietnam, of the memory of that experi-



ence, and in flashback, glimpses of that experience itself. Now I know this is a bit pretentious of me, because I was never there. but I think I have a lock on the feeling. I've researched Vietnam heavily – and while that's no substitute for being there, I do understand trauma, and I think that for people who were over there, that certainly was a trauma. So I won't do the subject a disservice. I hope not anyway.

SW: You've long been recognised as a 'brandname' horror writer. Yet it's obvious that *Koko* is going to be something different than what your fans may be expecting. Are you concerned about being considered – and packaged – solely as a writer of horror?

PS: I think there's no doubt that it won't be packaged as a horror novel. The publishers are very happy that it isn't a straightforward horror novel, because they feel, and quite rightly so, that there are plenty of new readers who can be reached by something other than a straightforward horror novel. I've always felt – at least with the last couple of books – that I was more or less making my own territory anyway. *Floating Dragon* was certainly horror, but it was a kind of horror that was very peculiar to me. So I'm just trying to widen that territory a little bit; it feels better than to write a more narrowly channeled work.

A SERIOUS HANG OUT

SW: Are you still a one-project writer?

PS: Yes, that's all I can do. If I write five pages a day, I don't want to write something at night! I want to relax. Talk to my kids or my wife! I have other projects lying around, waiting, until I finish *Koko*. I have some novellas that I've set aside or that I'm thinking about for the book that will come next. I've written notes about them, because I've had a couple of new ideas, but I'm very definitely a one-project-at-a-time person, just because it takes a lot of concentration to do one thing. And I don't want to scatter my concentration.

SW: Would one of those novellas be *Blue Rose*, which appeared in Dennis Etchison's anthology, *Cutting Edge*? (see reference in *THEY LIVE!* interview with John Carpenter, page 10.)

PS: Yes. I was very happy about that story – it's about the childhood of one of the characters in *Koko*. A very disturbed person called Harry Beevers. He's not a crazed madman, but he's a first cousin, ideologically. This was the year when I wasn't going to write anything. I was just going to sit out in the sun, get a good tan, read a lot of good books, drink a lot of

beer . . . ! Just hang out. I was going to seriously 'hang out'. But my year of hanging out was over, though I didn't realise it at the time.

I started working on *Blue Rose*, and I was affected very strongly by it. First of all, because it was the first thing I had tried to write in about a year, and it seemed very personal to me. And sometimes, when I was done at the end of the day, I would be shaking when I was through, just because of what I'd stirred up by writing. I rewrote it more times than anything else I had ever written up until that time. If you look at the story, it's much more edited, much more careful, much more transparent: the point is not the style, the point is what's happening. So I started off writing *Koko* in that same careful, step-by-step way. When I recovered some of my former confidence, I started to write more lyrically, but I still remembered the lessons I had learned then. So in general my style is a little more careful . . . pared down . . . a little more responsible is the word I'm looking for.

SW: So, in a sense, the story is a prequel to *Koko*?

PS: the way I envisioned it, people would first read *Koko* and say, 'Jesus, this guy Harry Beevers really is funny – why is he so terrible? Why does everybody hate him?' And then a year later they pick up *Blue Rose* in this collection and say, 'Ah – that's what happened to Harry Beevers; that's the clue!' I thought of it like a little time bomb that would trail after *Koko* and then explode a year later. Now hundreds of people have already read *Blue Rose* in the Underwood-Miller limited edition, and thousands of people will have read it in *Cutting Edge*. But – many, many more will not know about Harry Beevers until they finally get that book of novellas.

THE SECRET ABUSE

SW: Since you don't have a dozen other projects at hand, can you tell us something more about the other novellas for that as yet untitled collection?

PS: Well, I have *The General's Wife* – which has appeared in an American limited edition from Donald M Grant – based on that Carlos Fuentes novel, *Aura*. I have a story, which is a kind of joke on *The Talisman*, which is half done. It'll be about an editor who, after Steve dies of a heart attack and I went crazy, then publishes *The Talisman* and claims to have written a third of it! And how he gets all the acclaim and becomes a famous publisher, and he's a fraud of course. The character's a lot like Harry Beevers in that there's something really wrong underneath – but nobody knows!

And I was thinking of one traditional ghost story, about a man whose brother was killed in Vietnam, and he goes to his brother's house to talk to his widow . . . and something bizarre happens. That's all outlined. There's another one that has to deal with storytelling that I've done a few pages of . . . there's also a story called *Sexual Abuse* or *The Secret* – I don't know which – that's done in first draft. So it'll be a good, thick book – these are longish stories about 90 pages apiece.

SW: You've achieved critical and commercial success well beyond the expectations of most authors. How does that affect you creatively, to know that you have unlimited freedom because your books have done so well in the past?

PS: When I was given something like 'unlimited freedom' in about 1979 – when *Ghost Story* suddenly made tons of money, and I was suddenly reasonably well-known – from then on I knew I was going to be given a lot of rope by any publisher. And the truth is, I just wrote the books I wanted to write. I never deviated from my own course, which was to amplify the little inventions I had stumbled on in the course of my earlier career.

So I feel I can lift above the limits I've put upon myself, rather than what other people have put upon me. I'm also trying to explore what surrounds horror – what's in back of it, what kind of feeling is fear really about? How does it work in normal life? It's not as far apart from what I've written about in the past as it would appear; the central core of things is still pretty much the same. But this time there's no bogeyman or vampires.

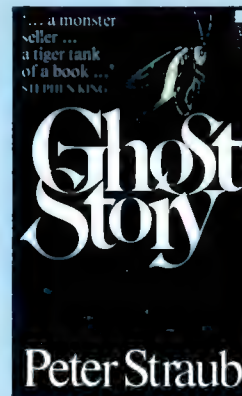
SW: In other words, you're still gripped by the subject, but in the sense of the psychological and the 'real', rather than the imaginary or supernatural.

PS: What you're implying is correct. I was just tired of the conventional stock images of horror. Besides, I have already done everything I could think of with that in *Floating Dragon*. And that was part of the point of that novel – to get rid of all those stock imagers in as gaudy and happy and excessive and in as violent a fashion as I could think of!

MAKING MOVIES

SW: Both *Julia* and *Ghost Story* were made into motion pictures; neither, unfortunately, with memorable results. Yet I'm curious if any other adaptations of your novels are pending?

PS: No. I turned down a couple of offers. Because it was part of that feeling I had about wanting to get away from conventional, stock



"I'm trying to explore what surrounds horror – what kind of feeling is fear really about? How does it work in normal life?"



images of horror. So it meant that I didn't want to see my name tied to images just like that on the screen. It seemed embarrassing, juvenile. Now I'm passing that feeling. I've been talking to William F Nolan about *Floating Dragon*. It would be nice to have him do it as a mini-series; so we've been talking about that for a year or more. But there's nothing else in the works. *If You Could See Me Now* has been optioned by the same guy for about 20 years, and he's asleep or something!

And *Shadowland* nobody can figure out how to make! And I wish somebody would remake *Ghost Story*. I think *Koko* might make a good movie. I wouldn't at all mind seeing that made into a film, if it could all fall into place at the end.

SW: What's the latest on the film version of *The Talisman*?

PS: Oh, yeah, that's right—I forgot that one.

SW: Remember—it's the book you wrote a few years ago with Steve what's-his-name?

PS: Oh, yeah! And then the other Steve bought it.

Every now and then Steve King tells me that: 'The screenplay is written, and that they cast the movie, and that Steven Spielberg is going to direct it'. Then Kirby McCauley (*Straub's agent*) tells me that: 'No, Steven Spielberg probably wouldn't direct it, but somebody like Joe Dante or Robert Zemeckis'. And I thought, 'Gee, if they're going to be like that, why not use Richard Donner?' I dig Dick Donner; I think he's a neat guy. I like his movies—I liked *The Goonies* and I loved *Ladyhawke*. Beautiful! A very romantic film, so, he'd be nice.

But I still think Spielberg would be best. Because Spielberg's own inherent set of values, his smell is right. It's like the 'smell' of *The Talisman*—a kind of entranced wonder and rapture. That sort of 'lit from within' quality would be just right. So if he does it, that would be great, and if one of those other guys does it, it'll probably be all right, too. I mean, this is like telling you what happened two years ago to two other guys. I say, let's see the movie—it would sell two million more books, which would be great!

IN COLLABORATION

SW: Considering the success of *The Talisman*, can we assume you may be collaborating with Stephen King again? Or with some other writer?

PS: I might do another collaboration with Steve. I don't think I'd ever do one with anyone else! A few years ago we were up at his house, and he asked me: 'Peter, do you want to do another collaboration?' And I said, 'Let me get over the first one!' And he said,

'Okay, okay. We'll talk about it later.' It's very tempting—but we agreed to shelve all discussions for about four years, until I could do all the work I had to do. And Steve had that film—*Maximum Overdrive*—to do, plus a couple of other projects he wanted to get out of the way. Now I think all Steve wants to do is relax. He wants to take some time off like I did a while back.

Though Steve's version is going to be a lot more energetic than mine: he's going to write only eight novels instead of 15! So another collaboration is possible, if unlikely. I bet if we did do it, it would be a real straightforward horror novel that would probably be more like what people expected the first book to be. It would be a lot of fun to do.

SW: As I'm sure you're aware, the fans that King has in some cases border on true fanaticism. I understand that when *The Talisman* was published, you felt overwhelmed at the exposure your own private life was receiving at the time.

PS: There was a short period like that for me. With Steve, it isn't about the books anymore, it's about fame itself. It's a strange phenomenon, which Steve handles very well. But some aspects of that, when it overlapped into my life, made me feel invaded. And intruded upon. Now I might have been just ridiculously maidenly about my life and not wanting strangers to pour through it, but that's how it felt for a while. Some of those feelings are coming back.

I remember being interviewed by a writer from *Newsweek*, who pretended to be a nice guy. And he also interviewed Steve. But he came to my house. And he sat on my furniture, then he went away and wrote his piece. He trashed me, and he trashed *The Talisman*, and he trashed Steve and the whole concept, saying it was all about money.

SW: I recall the article. There was a line which went something like: 'People were expecting books for Christmas, and instead what they received were *Talismans*'.

PS: Yeah. Great guy, huh? This is a side issue, but it's what happens when you suddenly become real conspicuous. You can't help but think that somebody might come along someday with a little gun. Anyway, I remember that guy's name from *Newsweek*. He'll never be in my house again.

KICK IN THE PANTS

SW: Apparently the occasional abuse by the media or some fans doesn't deter you from attending the World Fantasy Convention.

PS: That's one of the best things

about the convention for people like me, because you feel like you're in a known world. A familiar world. It's not like you see these people everyday, but they know what's happening; and you know what *their* role is, and they know what *your* role is. It's also nice because there's nobody with spaceguns and laser beam helmets or togas on!

SW: I know you give out few blurbs for other writers, yet I saw one recently recommending a novel by John Farris. What's your impression of him—he seems to keep a pretty low profile for such a successful novelist.

PS: He's a good guy—a smart person, and he's been around. He knows quite a few things. He's younger than I'd thought he'd be when I met him—he's like a kid! He keeps up with things by reading everybody. My sense of him is that he's very involved with the film world, that he makes the bulk of his income working on screenplays. He'd be a great hit at a World Fantasy Convention because he is a little mysterious. He's written a lot of good books, but most of them appeared before the bubble broke in the field, like *When Micheal Calls*, and *All Heads Turn When The Hunt Goes By*.

SW: How close are you to publishing *Koko*?

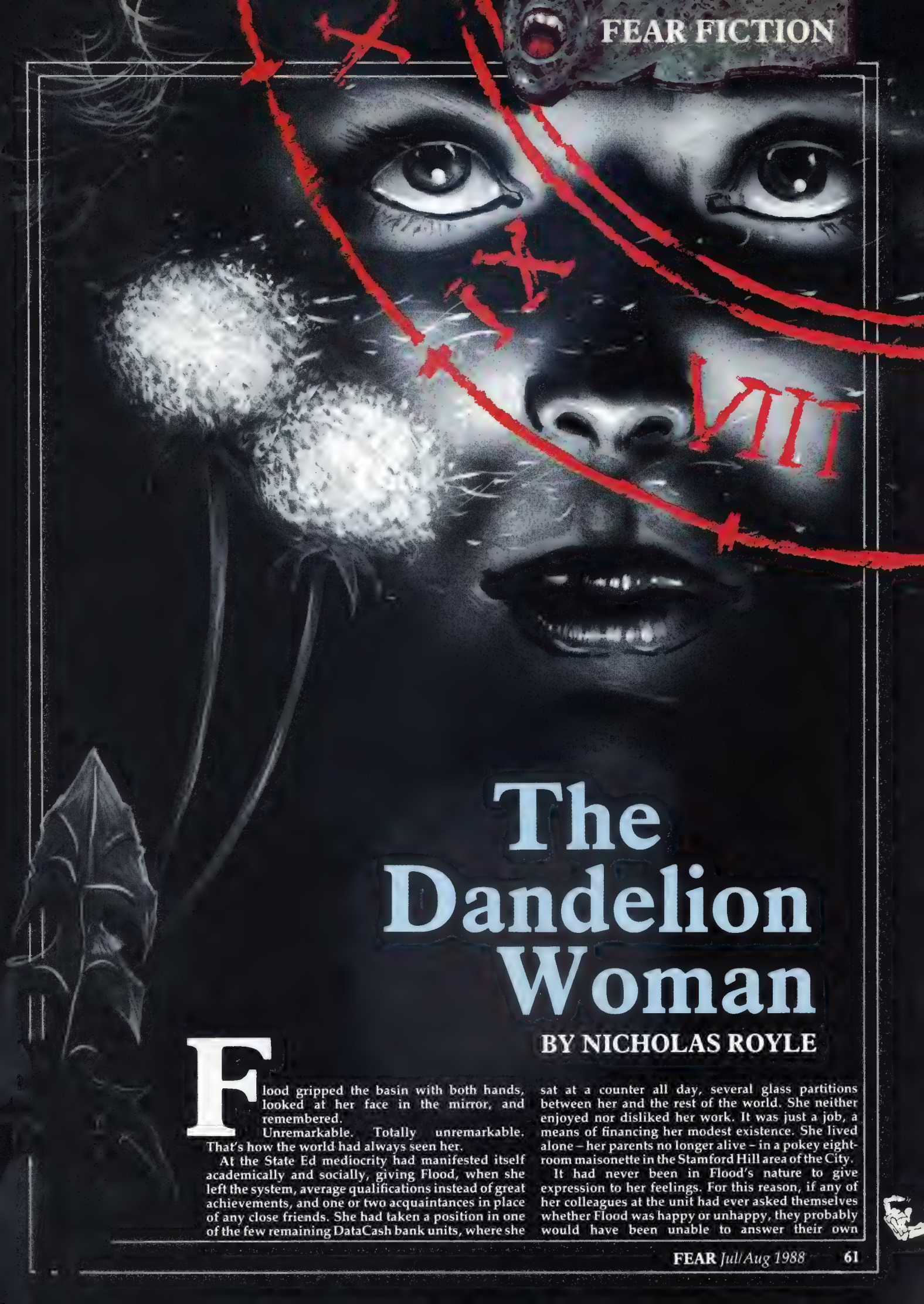
PS: Well, I would never advise a writer to take a year off from writing! But I'm on track, and the book is looking well. It's scheduled for publication in the fall of this year. It worries me sometimes that I no longer have any idea how a book is going to end, or what all these people are going to do, but in almost everything I've done it's been like that. It just happens. I reach a certain point where I realise: 'Oh, that's why I had this character go there and do this on that date, so...'

SW: It would seem like an enormous creative risk to delve 500 pages into a novel and not have any idea how it's going to end!

PS: Well, desperation does a lot of good for the unconscious! Sometimes a kick in the pants is helpful. It is a little risky, maybe. But it only felt risky to me the first couple of times, and then I realised that lightning was going to strike. And on this book, lightning has struck two or three times. And it has to strike a few more times before it's done. But it always has, so it always will. I know enough about myself to know that everything is secretly prepared, and I just have to wait for it to come.



"I'm on track, and the book (Koko) is looking well. It's scheduled for publication in the fall of this year."



The Dandelion Woman

BY NICHOLAS ROYLE

Flood gripped the basin with both hands, looked at her face in the mirror, and remembered. Unremarkable. Totally unremarkable. That's how the world had always seen her.

At the State Ed mediocrity had manifested itself academically and socially, giving Flood, when she left the system, average qualifications instead of great achievements, and one or two acquaintances in place of any close friends. She had taken a position in one of the few remaining DataCash bank units, where she

sat at a counter all day, several glass partitions between her and the rest of the world. She neither enjoyed nor disliked her work. It was just a job, a means of financing her modest existence. She lived alone – her parents no longer alive – in a pokey eight-room maisonette in the Stamford Hill area of the City.

It had never been in Flood's nature to give expression to her feelings. For this reason, if any of her colleagues at the unit had ever asked themselves whether Flood was happy or unhappy, they probably would have been unable to answer their own

question. From time to time it happened that one side of her mouth would rise or dip very slightly. This could happen when engaged in conversation or engrossed in work. It would have been an exaggeration to call this a smile.

Flood knew something the others didn't.

She guarded her secret carefully. It allowed her to remain above all those who looked down on her; for she knew what the world thought of her: people didn't generally look at her, but if they did, Flood saw their evident disdain of a woman severely lacking. She would never be invited to their parties. But then Flood was the first person to admit she was no great social success – their competitions were a mockery unto themselves. She had been to one or two parties – up rather than downtown – and had felt very much out of place. She would spend the evening on the move, roving from the kitchens to the lavatory, occasionally to the music suite, where she would permit her bottom to rest only momentarily on a cushion before lifting it sharply up again and taking it out of the room. She gave off visible signs of distress when young men, alcohol sweating out of every pore, thrust their faces into her bosom and asked their inane questions: did she come here often? What was her name, would she like a dance or a piece of real sausage on a stick? Unwilling to assist with their inquiries, Flood would slide away down the corridors back to the kitchens, where oblivion awaited her.

There was one question, however, which Flood did like to have asked of her: Did she know what the time was? For Flood did know what the time was. She always knew the exact time. This was her secret, her one great talent. With its source she could not claim to be familiar, though she was of the belief that it was not instinctive. She had arrived at a tentative conclusion – that it had to do with subliminal assimilation of the visible symptoms of time – after years of questioning and she remained unsure simply because she didn't like to grant herself the amount of intelligence she imagined one would need to solve such a difficult problem.

Time, Flood realised, was invisible; but there are countless millions of little signs which indicate its passing: leaves falling off the trees, shadows lengthening, grit being blown from a (listed) crumbling stone building. But Flood could see much further than that. She watched lines deepening in people's faces, wallpaper peeling off a wall, trees growing, trees falling.

Flood, cautious, kept her gift a secret, not wishing to become a curiosity. Without it she would have been as her mute tormentors thought her to be. Restraint was imperative: if asked the time, she would expose her wristwatch to her own unnecessary scrutiny before parting with the information which she had of course already known. To allow others into her secret would only lead to its devaluation. The only times she had come close to doing this were at the few parties she had attended. If asked the time when drunk she would blurt out the time exact to the second. She would not be able to stop her chest swelling out with pride.

Flood feared the dark; once, in total darkness, the power had deserted her. She didn't need all the lights on, just the smallest amount of light. She slept at that time under the dim glow emitted by a digital clock display, in need not of the numbers but of their light, which (unlike the lamps she had tried) was not bright enough to keep her awake. Were she to wake in the night, she would be able to see the expanding grain in her antique wooden headboard, which was warping extremely slowly on account of the ancient radiator behind it. Sometimes there was sufficient light from the window, but there were many very dark nights and the streetlamps in Hillside Road failed to work from time to time.

Many would see it as a curse, she guessed, but only

on that one occasion had it appeared this way to her. Plunged into total darkness by a power failure, she had lain in bed paralysed with terror and the overwhelming recognition of her mortality and insignificance. There had been pain in her chest. Time pressing down on her; an infinite accumulation of minutes, hours, days, years crushing under its weight like a vast column of compacted dust. Shivering and sweating she had managed to grope for some matches to light the candle she kept by the bed in case of such an emergency.

Flood's knuckles were white on the edge of basin as she remembered the dreadful fright the loss of light had caused. Her thoughts were interrupted by a noise in the next room. For a brief instant the ghost of a smile alighted on her features and then was lost to vacancy.

Her months at the bank unit had drifted into years and, although at first quite unaware of the fact, she had become the object of a man's affections. He had been coming into the unit every afternoon for as long as anyone could remember, to hand in personally the DataCash figures for the automatic delivery store just around the corner. Even when there was an available assistant he would still queue before Flood's window. She was slow to catch on. The observation made, however, Flood saw no harm in letting on to the young man and exchanging pleasantries with him. The situation developed: Flood felt herself being drawn into something, she herself remaining passive. Little things they said to each other, the smallest liberties taken in their familiarity. While in possession – on her own ready admission – of only average intelligence, Flood was not stupid. She knew what was happening and she allowed it to happen, even encouraging it where she glimpsed an opportunity.

Flood and Mattar became close; going out together regularly after work. They would go for a meal, or to the Videocity, the latest reincarnation of the old hospital at Hyde Park Corner. Sometimes Mattar invited Flood back to his sprawling rooms in Soho after their evening out. She would go for coffee and biscuits, then Mattar would see her home. There was never any question of her staying the night: they'd both voted themselves onto the majority in the moral elections which succeeded the Sexual Revolution. Not that they were without passion; Flood looked

Flood saw no harm in letting on to the young man and exchanging pleasantries with him.

XII

forward to sharing physical affection with her husband, but that was just the point, her bedmate had to be her spouse and none other. It seemed inevitable that they should have the tests and marry.

Should she tell him? After much thought and silent debate she decided against it. There was the possibility that he might allow her peculiarity to put him off the idea of marrying her. And she had made up her mind not to tell anyone at all in case, by doing so, she decreased the strength of her talent.

Tripping on nostalgia they married in a church and honeymooned in a seaside town.

The back room of an antique shop revealed a little old-styled cafe. Gleaming replica horse brasses hung on hooks around a real fire grate, but Flood and Mattar hardly noticed them, occupied as they were, staring into each other's eyes. Flood's eyes were no distinct colour, not quite brown, not quite grey. Her nose was neither too small nor too prominent, it was just there. Her mouth was not very firm, her lips glistened. She wore a green imitation lambswool sweater over a white nylon smock. On the table between them stood a solitary steaming cup of tea. Mattar's red wash-as-silk tie had diagonal stripes which clashed with the horizontal bars on his shirt. Flood could see the pores on his nose opening as the steam from the tea curled up his face. The eyes were large with pale blue irises. And deep down in his pupils there was Flood again.

"Shall we go?" suggested Mattar.

As they rose to go Flood admired her husband's sinewy, almost simian body. Tonight would be the first time for both of them, and Flood was ready.

A couple of hours later, after dinner in a waiter-service French restaurant, Mattar locked the hotel bedroom door behind them. They stood and just looked at each other for a full minute before Mattar made the first move: he touched her cheek. As if taking this as her cue, Flood crossed the room and disappeared into the adjoining bathroom. When she reemerged, in a full white nightdress, Mattar was still partially dressed and very embarrassed. She smiled and switched off the main light, leaving just a bedside reading light on what she would make her side of the bed. She slipped between the sheets and Mattar followed her timidly. She took a hold of him but he disengaged himself and asked Flood if she would

please extinguish the light. "But it's barely noticeable," Flood protested lightly. "It can't possibly bother you."

Mattar persisted: "I'm sorry, but I'm painfully shy. It's not personal. I just can't bear to think of anyone seeing me naked."

Flood surveyed her immediate surroundings and, her eyes alighting on an active telecomputer screen, heaved an inward sigh of relief.

"All right," said Flood, hating the deceit as she switched the light off. The soft green glow from the console was quite sufficient: she saw movement in the old ceiling beams, indicating that the building was either still settling or subsiding and would become unsafe in the near future.

Again Flood reached out but he just lay there like a marble figurine.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I'm sorry. I know you must think I'm silly," he began. "But do you mind if we disconnect that monitor? Don't be angry. It's the light from it, you see. Just make this one concession for me. We've got to be in total darkness. You do understand, don't you?"

Flood looked over towards the window. Her husband had already drawn the thick curtains across some time earlier. Now he was unplugging the telecomputer. She allowed her head to drop back down onto the pillow as she perceived the dreadful reality of her situation. The future seemed to have become as black as the night which smothered her. This was probably the closest she and Mattar would ever be, unless either of them managed to overcome their particular fear, which could take years and years and indeed might never happen. She made her body small and delivered herself into the clasp of his embrace, her head, leaking tears, pressing onto his chest.

As Flood lay there debating her options and fighting to keep panic at bay, she became aware of the persistent thump somewhere close to her head. Its rhythm was consistent, seductive. A thump, a beat and then another thump. Or rather . . . of course! . . . a beat, a pause, beat, pause . . . pause . . . beat . . . beat. Her husband's heartbeat.

"Twenty-six minutes to two," Flood announced with confidence to the darkness.



NICHOLAS ROYLE, aged 24, is an established actor and a new talent in the horror and science fiction genres. His stories have appeared in Dennis Etchison's *Cutting Edge* anthology, from Futura, *The 26th Pan Book Of Horror Stories* and a new *Shadows* anthology from Charles L. Grant, which will be published in the States later this year. He lives in London where he's at work on his first novel and more short stories.

So that had been it: the turning point. Power lost and found; given, in fact, by her husband. It was some hours later than two o'clock now, these few days later. It was, the face in the mirror above the washbasin told her, nine fifty-three and eight seconds . . . nine . . . ten . . . eleven seconds . . . Thump. Twelve. Thump . . . The signals seemed to vibrate through from the next room. Nine fifty-three and twenty-two seconds and Flood still had her decision to make. Not that time was a factor, though. She laughed at the irony: time was, after all, the only factor.

As Flood lay next to her sleeping husband the morning after that first night, she tried to identify exactly what she was feeling, for she did not feel that there was a difference in her. Something added or taken away or maybe both. They had made love the night before. It had not been easy; shyness, inexperience and thwarted anticipation collaborating to complicate an event already physically trying. But they had succeeded after a fashion and now Flood felt different. She could not be sure whether it was the lovemaking or the loss and instant rediscovery of her strength which was affecting her. Although, after some thought, she didn't see why the latter should bother her: she still had her power just like before. If anything, she was stronger now, for she no longer had to fear the dark.

The answer to Flood's conundrum was provided a short time later. Mattar had awoken and gone to the bathroom to wash and dress. While he was gone, Flood looked up at the ceiling beams she had watched the night before by the light of the monitor. For a moment she didn't see any movement; they were just dead wood. Then as she concentrated she saw them move: a crack was forming. But still the strangeness persisted in her. And in a flash it came to her: she did not know what the time was. Here she was, observing time's passing, but unable now to measure it, to pin it down with numbers. But she'd been able to the night before, when she'd heard and felt Mattar's heart beating. And as she thought of this, she became aware of the steady vibration emanating from the door in the corner of the room. Or rather, from the floor under the bed, whose four legs rested firmly on the parquet. Impossible it seemed that she should be able to feel her husband's heartbeat when he was in the next room. But she did appear to be sensing those very vibrations as she lay there. She knew the time now; she could see it on a clockface in her mind's eye.

Later the same morning Flood went out to buy a newspaper. Mattar stayed in the hotel. She had told him she would probably take a short walk along the old promenade as well. She was back at his side, however, breathless and clutching her paper only minutes later. She told him she couldn't bear the separation. And in a certain sense this was entirely true: she had walked and seen all the familiar symptoms but had been powerless to translate these into measured minutes. Her own wrist was bare and she had had to ask the time of a passer-by just so that at least she knew.

Flood was quiet over lunch in the hotel dining-room.

"What's the matter?" he had to ask her twice before he could break her trance. Her vague retort - "Nothing" - had failed to reassure him, she knew; but what could she do about it? Flood was lost, foundering in despair. Up until the day before yesterday she had been an individual, an independent being, strong and sure. Now what had she become? A lackey, a pet dog running to heel. Without the proximity of her husband's heart she was that weak thing she so despised because other did. She was no longer alone in the world; she was accompanied, imprisoned, chained. She loved Mattar, true; but she wanted to love him and retain a certain independence, that of being a free agent, a

human being.

"What's wrong? Answer me!" He was squeezing her hand, his appeals becoming urgent.

She looked up at his worried face and here the nightmare proper began. Between his face and hers there hung, as there would anywhere, a veil of dust. Little particles floating in the air. As her eyes focussed slowly through the dust to Mattar's eyes, she discerned the source of much of this floating debris. House dust, Flood had once read somewhere, is largely composed, about 80 percent or so, of dead skin. Sceptical about this she could no longer be, as she watched the tiniest motes flaking off the skin of Mattar's face, catching the currents in the air and floating to join fluff, fur, hair and the dead skin of other people. It was her gift that allowed her this microscopic view. Some gift! she thought in a flash.

He was pleading for her attention; she gave it, or at least its pretence. His mouth was opening and closing, gaping, his eyes betrayed his anxiety. And something else as well maybe: was the left eye becoming ever so slightly clouded? The threatening shadow of a cataract which might impair his vision in twenty or thirty years time. Flood's gaze shifted to the tiny crow's feet lines at the corner of Mattar's eye. Were they slowly cutting deeper? Likewise the worry lines on his forehead. He was getting old; at twenty-eight he was getting old; no faster than anyone else but Flood could see it happening, it was her privilege to watch the process at close quarters.

Mattar had decided some external stimulus was needed to bring Flood out of this mesmeric condition. He knocked his wine glass to the floor with his finger. The silence was shattered and the scene brought to dissolution.

The rest of the day was played out - Flood like an actress walking through the part - and they went to bed.

The lights were out but the pulse of Mattar's blood filled Flood's ears. Their lips met and kissed, their arms climbing around each other's shoulders. Flood sank her tongue into Mattar's mouth and for a few short glorious moments thoughts flew away and her mind was blank. Nerve endings experienced the sensations without the dulling interference of thought. All too soon, however, her mind reminded her that she was enjoying making love, and directly her enjoyment faded. Her tongue ran over his teeth and gums, stopped suddenly and returned to repeat the movement, as if to reaffirm a discovery. No, it was impossible, Flood told herself, her senses were wrong, lying to her: telling her of the slow recession of her husband's gums. Her jaw fell slack, which Mattar saw as a pause for breath, and he buried his head in her chest. Hoping to block out thought Flood leant to kiss his ear. But her tongue brushed against wax which was gradually accumulating until in advanced age it would necessitate syringing. Mattar was murmuring into her neck. She lifted his chin and looked into his eyes, and in silent accord they manoeuvred their bodies so that one might enter the other. Little effort was required and their bodies moved together, once again cancelling thought as sensation took over. Their rhythm established itself and Flood became aware of Mattar's heart - her clock - which was beating a fraction faster with each thrust. Just as in slow-motion filming where the camera is speeded up in apparent contradiction, Flood's time slowed down as her husband's heart beat faster. They seemed to carry on in their rhythm - almost as if imprisoned by it - for an inestimable length of time.

Presently Flood's arousal began to near its peak, when suddenly an observation imposed itself and laid low all hopes for a climactic finish. She had detected an extremely subtle decrease in her own lubrication. It wasn't the slight discomfort which upset her; it was the way the observation followed the pattern established by the receding gums and ear wax,

**And in a flash
it came to her;
she did not
know what
the time was.**

and those things noted earlier – facial lines, skin flaking off – except that in this case the change was in her. Women, she knew, were supposed to experience a decrease in lubrication, but not until their 40s or 50s after the menopause. It seemed she was detecting the usually imperceptibly slow commencement of the process. Deep down she knew that this was nonsense; that loss of lubrication was part of the body's natural function during sex. Deeper down than that, however, she knew her fears were not unfounded. She knew that life was really death, but in slow-motion.

Whilst her thoughts sank and drifted in this vein she also registered the deceleration of Mattar's heartbeat. Just as before the quickened beat had prolonged the moment, the slowing-down incurred rapid acceleration and Flood felt herself being harried and rushed relentlessly, inexorably to her death.

In the morning while Mattar thought Flood was still asleep, she watched him dressing. After she had slipped into troubled, uncomfortable sleep the night before, Mattar had doubtless lain awake upset and hurt. As she watched his naked movements, any willingness or capability to account for her rejection of him evaporated. Even at a distance of seven or eight metres she could see his skin slowly losing its elasticity and beginning to sag in little pouches. His back was growing more curved; his shoulders hunching over; veins starting to stand out on his legs; the hair on his head losing its pigment. Changes which would take place over his lifetime, their processes clearly visible to Flood, for her to observe every minute of every day.

Flood got up from the bed and locked herself in the bathroom.

She could just leave him. Or was that a delusion? As long as his heart was beating she was its subject. Even as she listened now she detected a general tendency towards deceleration as he slipped inevitably into old age, and her death was rushed forward to meet her. She was still undecided as to whether they were compassionate or selfish motives when she opened the mirrored door of the cabinet and withdrew an unused razor blade. She would take his life, spare him the pain of ageing and free herself from the bonds of his heart. Afterwards she would either regain the independent source of her talent or she would lose it altogether.

But would it not be kinder and simpler to use the blade on herself? After all, hers was the problem, so if she died there would be no problem and Mattar would live. What kind of life would it be though? Blaming himself for what had happened. And how could Flood go to her death knowing what would happen to Mattar's body as the years took their toll? It was too much like avoiding a responsibility. She looked up from the blade to the mirror. Her lines grew deeper and more plentiful as she watched. All she had to do was avoid mirrors for the rest of her life: that was hardly too much to demand of herself.

Between her forefinger and thumb the razor blade snapped neatly into two halves. Leaving one in the basin and concealing the other in her palm, Flood went into the bedroom to kill her husband.

He was sitting at the dressing-table, his image reflected in three mirrors. Slowly and deliberately he was applying his cosmetics. Flood stepped forward from the threshold, her legs firm, like jelly. Play-acting normality she crossed to the bedside fittings and leafed through some papers, pushing some onto the floor in her nervousness. Bending to pick them up she cast a stealthy glance behind and saw Mattar's face in the left-hand mirror. He seemed not to be taking any notice of her.

She crossed the room with tiny steps and rested her hands on his shoulders. She scanned his face in the mirror, then in quarter-profile in the two wing mirrors. Her right hand rose to his neck. His eyes

looked up, seeking hers in the glass. She recognised the look in his eye – he was endorsing the apology he thought she was about to make. She had to prevent the situation from moving out of her control.

"Turn around," she said, the words dragged out of her throat like barbed wire.

He did as she said and looked up at her. Could she remember how to smile? Yes, she could and so did; and as she smiled she raised the hand concealing the blade to Mattar's throat. Then he spoke:

"Kneel down. So I can see you properly."

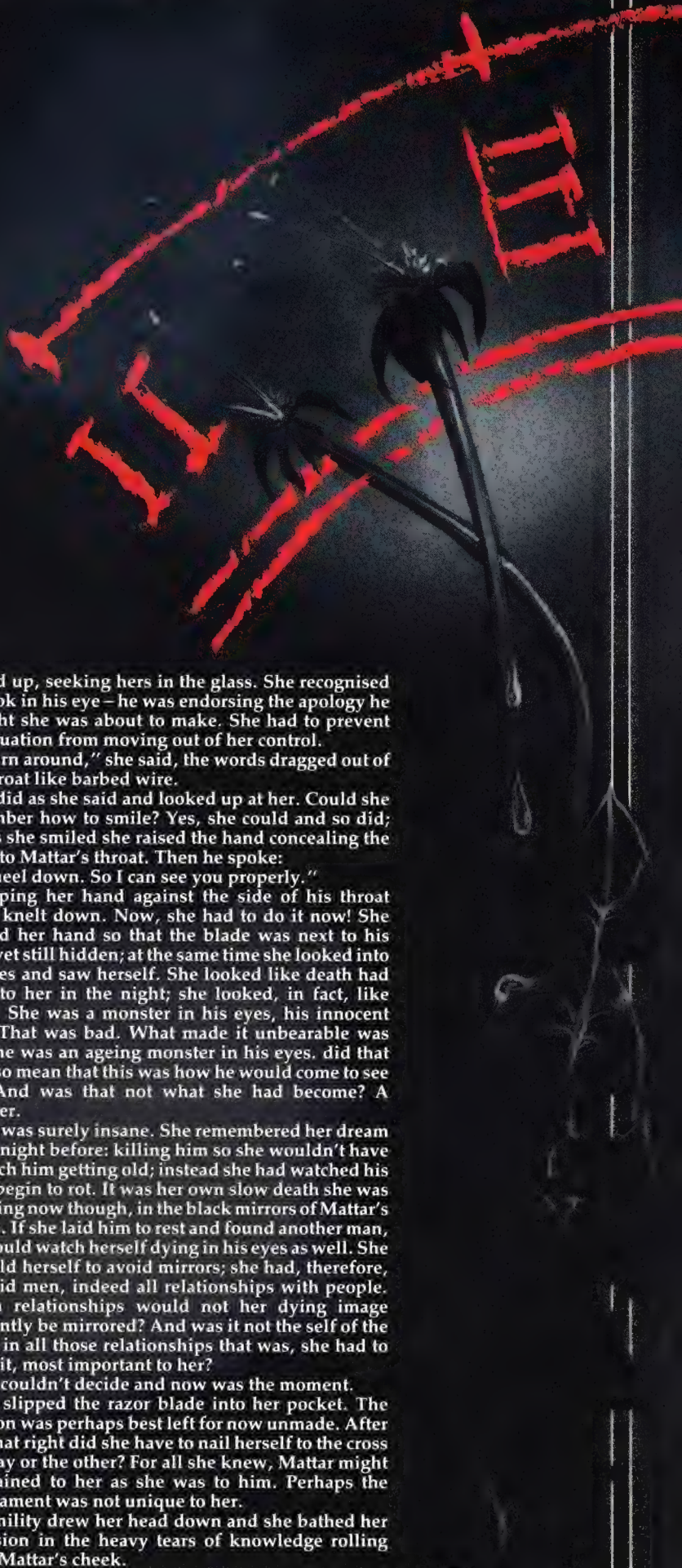
Keeping her hand against the side of his throat Flood knelt down. Now, she had to do it now! She opened her hand so that the blade was next to his skin, yet still hidden; at the same time she looked into his eyes and saw herself. She looked like death had come to her in the night; she looked, in fact, like death. She was a monster in his eyes, his innocent eyes. That was bad. What made it unbearable was that she was an ageing monster in his eyes, did that not also mean that this was how he would come to see her? And was that not what she had become? A monster.

She was surely insane. She remembered her dream of the night before: killing him so she wouldn't have to watch him getting old; instead she had watched his body begin to rot. It was her own slow death she was watching now though, in the black mirrors of Mattar's pupils. If she laid him to rest and found another man, she would watch herself dying in his eyes as well. She had told herself to avoid mirrors; she had, therefore, to avoid men, indeed all relationships with people. For in relationships would not her dying image constantly be mirrored? And was it not the self of the image in all those relationships that was, she had to admit it, most important to her?

She couldn't decide and now was the moment.

She slipped the razor blade into her pocket. The decision was perhaps best left for now unmade. After all, what right did she have to nail herself to the cross one way or the other? For all she knew, Mattar might be chained to her as she was to him. Perhaps the predicament was not unique to her.

Humility drew her head down and she bathed her confusion in the heavy tears of knowledge rolling down Mattar's cheek.

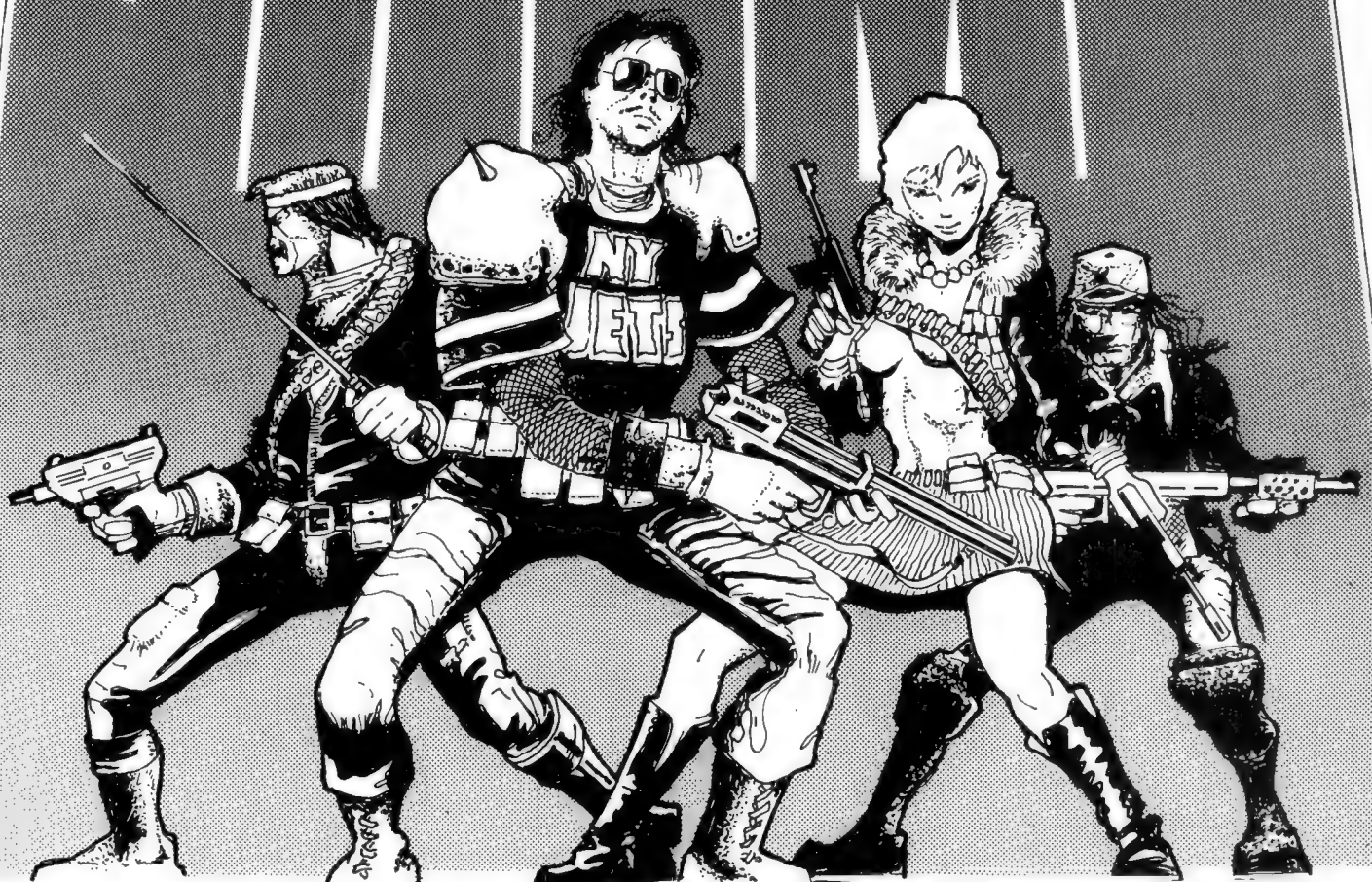


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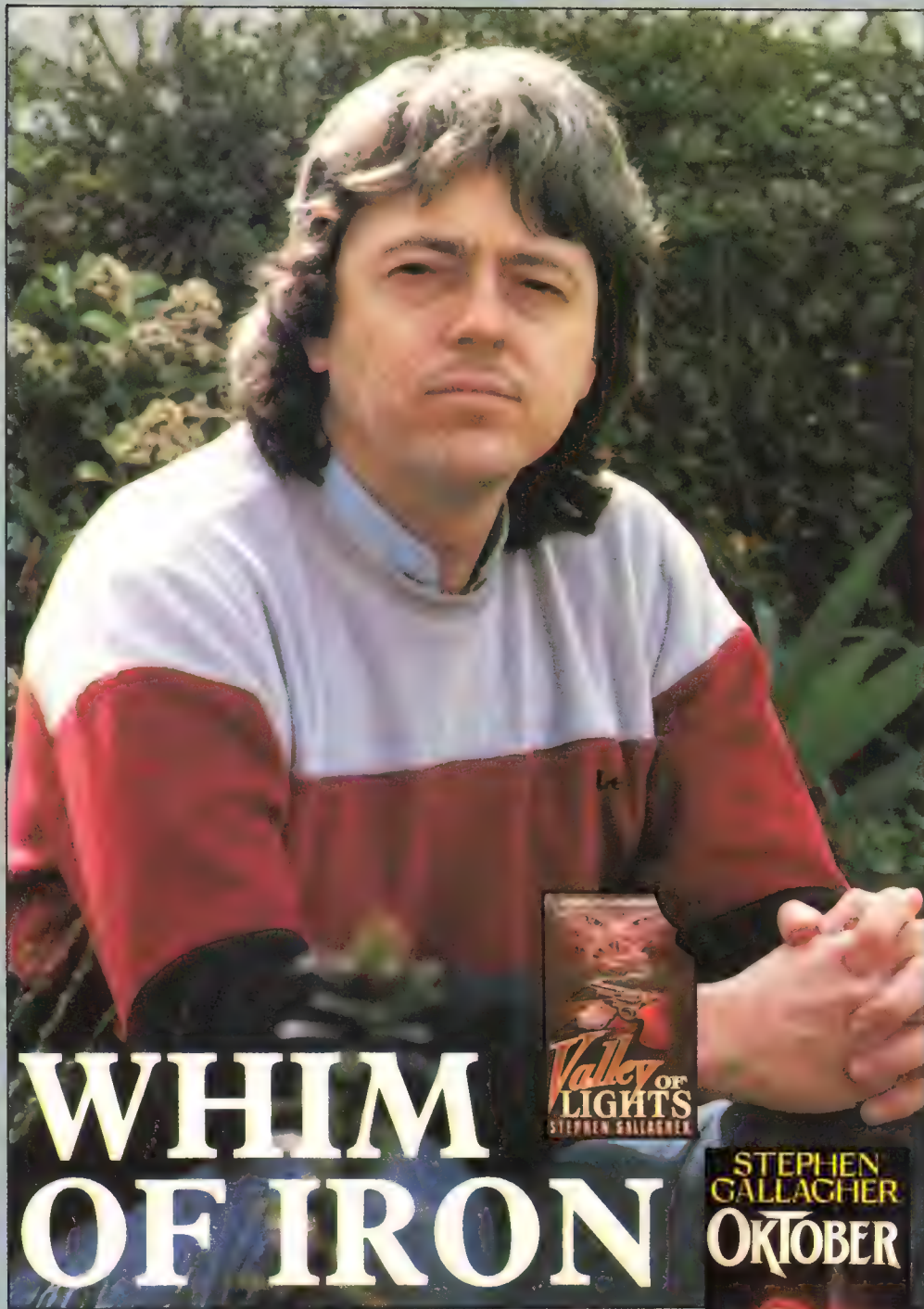
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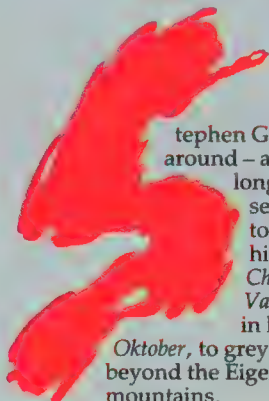
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WHIM OF IRON

Self-confessed writer of straight novels with horrible things in them, Stephen Gallagher spoke to John Gilbert about his work, and what he found in *The Boathouse* – his latest book.



Stephen Gallagher has been around – and not just for a long time. Heavy research for his novels took him from the hills of Cumbria for *Chimera*, to Arizona's *Valley Of Lights* and, in his new hardback,

Oktober, to grey, snowy wastes beyond the Eiger range of mountains.

And yet, his international reputation as a best-selling thriller writer has not interfered with his enthusiasm for the Lancashire countryside where he lives with his wife and young daughter. Though still only in his 30s Stephen is one of Britain's brightest challengers to US super-sellers such as Dean R Koontz and John Farris. He has just delivered his next book, *Down River*, to publisher Hodder and Stoughton, there's another one in the works and he's just started work on *The Boathouse* which could see publication in the early-Nineties.

JG: Your latest paperback, *Valley Of Lights*, labels you as a horror novelist, but your work as a whole encompasses thrillers, science fiction, even, and to some extent reportage in the kind of detail that you use in the books. Do you see yourself as a genre author or more in the mainstream, like Dean R Koontz?

SG: I have to confess I've never particularly worried about whether I'm genre or not, it's just that every time I raise my head from the trough and look around horror is where I find that I am. I sometimes wonder if I really can hold my hand up and say that I belong there in the midst of the other horror writers, because I suspect that what I'm doing is writing straight novels with horrible things in them.

The last novel that I did that had a really supernatural element was *Follower*. *Valley Of Lights* was a novel with what you could call a supernatural element, but it's worked out on a completely rational basis. Given the notion of a creature with certain abilities and a certain *modus vivendi*, from that point onward you deal exactly on those terms and there's no garlic, there's no crucifix, there's no going to the edge of reality and peeping over and seeing an alternative reality beyond it. It's the reality in which we live in a deal with, but you just have this one wild element thrown into it.

JG: So, you prefer the logical plot, then.

SG: I think I do. It certainly forces me to be more rigorous in thinking and, therefore, more rigorous in writing. One of the problems that I've always felt has held down science fiction and horror – and to a great extent fantasy as well – is the idea that it gives the writer far too much freedom. It's very easy to write horror, science fiction, or fantasy badly, simply because if you paint yourself into a corner it's very easy to invent your way out of it. You set yourself rules at the beginning which state that anything is possible and, therefore there are very few barriers that you need to contend with; and contending with those barriers can be one of the main sources of energy in fiction.

JG: Surely, though, the best horror writers do have rules within their alternate realities? Do you think that gone are the days when an author can get away with saying: 'I can get myself out of this situation by making the hero fly'?

SG: I don't think they're gone entirely. We have some very good writers around at the moment who tend to put that (sort of) writing in the shade and make it less easy to get away with. But, if there was nothing else available, that would be the kind of writing that would be

predominating. For every good horror writer out there and selling, there are a thousand in the closet who are doing stuff with the magic rings and the three wishes and the genies who really can make anything possible. Making everything possible, though, can drain a lot of the interest and intricacy out of a story.

WAITING FOR THE DEAD TO DROP

JG: Was *Chimera* the first novel you wrote, or is there early unpublished stuff on your shelf at home?

SG: The stuff that I'd published before that tended to fall into the category of novelisation rather than novel. It was stuff based on my own early radio work.

The radio work itself was based on material that had originally been intended to be novels; so I don't call them pure novelisations – they're just weird hybrids which had passed through this metamorphosis stage: the caterpillar stage of radio and finally became the novel they were originally intended to be. But when you do that, something along the line gets compromised simply because you're rethinking for a medium and then you're rethinking back to another medium. It's like something that gets translated from one language into another and then gets translated back to the original language. The original intent is going to be somewhat warped along the way. So, I class them as apprentice novels.

Chimera was the first novel I planned and wrote as a book, and took pride in as a book, and never had anything else impinging upon it. It was that which was the most significant step forward careerwise for me in perceptual terms because I realised that here, out of everything else, is what I really wanted to do. Media work would be a nice sideline, but novel work was the first place to stand that I'd always been looking for.

JG: The early part of your life was geared toward drama. Where along the line did you decide to write novels?

SG: It's weird, because I always had an idea that this would be something I'd do at the end of my career.

I originally wanted to make my career in the film business, and went some way towards doing that, but I got diverted into a backwater of television presentation – which was something I took on to get an ACTT union card. I spent five years doing it and found there was no way of transferring across to studio production and I was second-from-

the-top and waiting for the guy in front of me to drop dead before I could move any further. And once I took over from him I'd have nowhere else to go. So it was some of the frustrations that I felt around that time that started venting themselves off in a writing career. Nobody was more surprised to find that I'd found what I liked doing in the world more than anything else.

PROSE BY TEMPERAMENT

JG: Was it easy for you to switch between the two types of writing?

SG: It was. I'm a prose writer by temperament, and in doing the radio stuff I'd been doing the preparation for the prose writing. Doing radio was like the nursery slope which prepared me for the complexity of taking on something that was 100,000 words long and having maintained a degree of control all the way through. I won't say I had 100% control over what I was doing. I certainly feel I'm closer to that degree of control now. With four books behind me I've got a reasonable perception of what I'm doing and how I'm doing it and, if it's not going well, how to make it right.

JG: Is character more important than plot now or vice versa?

SG: I can't easily draw a dividing line between them. The way that I develop something is that I have ideas lying around in note books and the moment of truth comes when putting two ideas together sparks off something that is greater than the sum of both of them. I get an image of the matrix of both plot and character. Character's heading somewhere and plot is a natural development of that.

JG: When you've got the idea do you have a strict writing régime?

SG: I suppose you'd call it a 'whim of iron'. You've got to produce the material if you're living on it. I love to produce the material, regardless of sales, the market, or of anything else. I've never yet worried about whether it's marketable or not. I went freelance in 1980 and I've had some low spots between then and now but somehow I was getting through. Throughout all that time I've always been convinced that somewhere further down the line, as long as I continued to do what I was doing, it was simply a matter of time before the world tuned into it. In this last 12 months that seems to have happened.

I used to work through the night, but since the baby came along I tend to sleep through the night or else I'm on call for cot duties. Most of the work I do late-morning to late-afternoon in a very concentrated burst. In that time I am very productive.

JG: Do you have a particular



October location by the Eiger



wordage goal per day?

SG: I only have that when I'm doing final draft. In early preparation – where the ideas are just coming to me for the first time and I'm looking for the interrelationships between them – if I can spend an entire day and just get three usable lines of idea which will spark off good material later on, I will be happy with that.

A HOLE IN THE PLOT

JG: Do you start a book at chapter one?

SG: In the early stages I'll develop bits and pieces and then tear all the pages out of the notebooks and shuffle them into the right order. Since these things have floated up from the subconscious there are automatically going to be links between the pieces of material, and it's up to me to discover them. Once I've discovered those links I go to an outline which will be very detailed, and once I've got that I'll develop the internal structure of the scenes which fall within it.

Once I've done that I go out and do research on location, and at the end of the day I end up with a ring-binder which has got everything in it stapled in the right order. I can sit with it on the desk in front of me and have the reliable support that all the interrelationships have been worked out and I can concentrate on rhythm, prose style, and the creation of suspense.

JG: Once you've finished the writing does your wife get involved in the reading process or do you separate work from family?

SG: My wife's only ever read one book prepublication, and that was *Valley Of Lights*; and that was mainly because we'd both been out to Phoenix together and I thought she'd appreciate the background in that. But I tend not to think that a thing is finished until it's typeset and corrected.

With *Follower*, the last day it was due to go for typesetting, I turned up on the editor's doorstep with a list of insert pages. I took the line that there was a hole in the plot but really I needed to tighten one or two things because this was the last opportunity, because once a thing is typeset it's hideously expensive to make even the most minor changes.

JG: Research. How do you approach it and how important is it to you?

SG: I go out. I rarely do library research. The thing that I most enjoy about research is walking the ground that the character is going to be walking. I do it with a little Pearlcarder to record my thoughts as I go along.

I take technical advice as well. For *Valley Of Lights* I rode night shift with the Phoenix police and got

plenty of material for Alex Volchak's working life. I still have friends out there who I communicate with and drop in on.

FUN WITH DOGS

JG: Do the locations suggest themselves through a story, or have you ever thought 'I like this place so I'll use it in the book'?

SG: Well, Phoenix got its hooks into me and drew me back. The same thing happened with certain parts of Switzerland for *Oktober*. It was in '77 when we were there on a visit and we took the railway up to the top of the mountain and passed through little place called Eigergletscher.

Just as we were passing through, I looked out of the window and saw this guy with a team of Huskies. That one impression lingered with me, and when I came to be doing the research for *Oktober* I started the whole thing in a drug research station (because Switzerland is the capital for pharmaceutical companies), a research station in an isolated spot halfway up the mountain – which had once been a sled-dog research centre and they were now using what was left of the stock of dogs as research models. It was this image that had lingered in my mind and in order to research that I went back to Switzerland. I got a pass to go to Eigergletscher from the railway company. I went back to that spot, interviewed the guy who ran the sled-dog station.

He showed me round the dog pens, put me in one of the pens and let 30 dogs loose at me. Sitting in a library just can't compare with that kind of fun.

GOING IN SANE

JG: Future projects: *The Boathouse*. What's it about and where is it set?

SG: *The Boathouse* is my favourite thing of anything I've done. It's not scheduled yet and it's going to get another draft. It's set in Cumbria, where *Chimera* was set.

It involves a Russian girl who who was successful at escaping from the Soviet Union on the second attempt. On the first attempt she was caught by the

Finnish police and handed back to the Russians. She was consigned to a psychiatric hospital, in Leningrad.

She went in sane and came out not-sane because what goes on in these places is a regime of medical torture. Things take place like injection of turpentine, wrapping somebody in wet canvas and the canvas dries out and tightens.

I went over to Leningrad as a tourist and detached myself from the party at the hotel and went off to find the hospital. I had nothing but the address and the map and didn't realise that the thing was in the middle of an industrial area – and I was looking for it on a Sunday morning.

There I was, the only person for miles around, standing in the middle of this empty street, trying surreptitiously to photograph this place and looking as inconspicuous as a bug on a sheet. I hightailed it out of the place as fast as possible and didn't feel safe until we'd crossed the border.

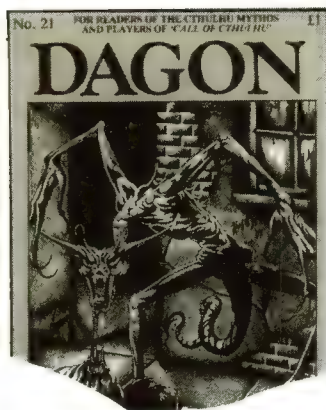
So; what happens in *The Boathouse* is that the girl gets into Britain on a stolen French passport and goes to ground in this small community in Cumbria. One guy takes her into his house and gets involved with her story. There's no sexual thing, but his relationship with a divorcee, who's an estate manager at the top of the lake, is wrecked because the divorcee won't get involved with a guy who's got another woman living in his house.

While this character triangle is going on, the death rate starts rising. It starts to look like a series of accountable accidents. It's only this accumulative thing through the seasons that finally three people – the guy who's got this girl in his house and works in a boat yard by the side of the lake, the girl who runs the estate at the top of the valley who realises that she has a piece of the jigsaw and the local policeman who has another piece of the jigsaw – the three of them come together and realise that this girl with the Russian accent is probably the most dangerous thing that has happened to the area since *Chimera*.

"Making everything possible can drain a lot of interest and intricacy out of a story."

Philippe Oriet and dogs





CTHULHU CALLS

Fans of HP Lovecraft will find *Dagon* to be THE fanzine where Call of Cthulhu is concerned.

Edited to almost professional standards by Carl T Ford, the magazine has been growing away from its roleplaying roots – though it does contain the occasional dedicated gaming article – and into the Lovecraft literary genre. It publishes well-illustrated short fiction from authors like Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley and, in the latest issue, Thomas Ligotti. Reasonably priced at £1.00, it can be obtained from 11, Warwick Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 6SW.

INTERZONE

Interzone is described as a science fiction and fantasy magazine – though the emphasis seems to be on SF and there's nothing wrong in that.

Interzone editor David Pringle specialises in publishing new short stories and in the past has included the work of Brian Aldiss, JG Ballard, William Gibson, Michael Moorcock and Ian Watson. The magazine also contains book and film reviews, news, and interviews. It's published quarterly and costs £1.95 an issue. More information from 124 Osbourne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU.



SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION

An eminent professional body whose members include editors, artists, critics, writers, teachers and librarians. Membership is by invitation only. Its patrons are Arthur C Clarke and Ursula Le Guin.

The group has a special relationship with the NELP (North-East London Polytechnic) and is housed on the top floor of the Frank Lampitt Library at the NELP's Barking Precinct in Dagenham, Essex, where it has collated some 12,000 volumes of science fiction and related works, which makes it Britain's biggest collection of SF.

Literary material includes the papers of the Flat Earth society, SF in Russia, original manuscripts of SF works which have been deposited by their authors, and a collection of fanzines spanning

the whole range of SF fandom. The Foundation's magazine contains reviews of new books, critical articles and letters with special attention paid to foreign-language SF. You will, however, find no fiction in its pages.

All inquiries should be addressed to **The Secretary, The Science Fiction Foundation, North-East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS.** According to the organisers, inquiries may meet with delays during the Polytechnic vacations. The Research Library is, however, open during Polytechnic term time on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between the hours of 10.00am and 3.30pm. An appointment is advisable and can be obtained by phone (01) 590 7722 – extension 2177.

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The fastest growing fan grouping in Britain is responsible for The British Fantasy Convention – held annually in Birmingham – The British Fantasy Awards and this year is hosting the World Fantasy Convention in London during October.

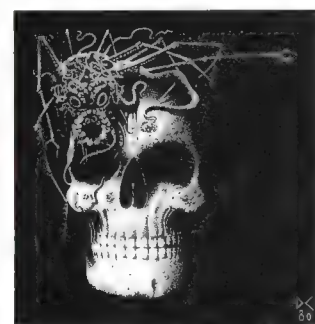
Its regular publications include a printed newsletter magazine filled with news, reviews and previews of books and films, short story collections such as *Winter Chills* and *Dark Horizons*, plus a variety of one-off booklets about famous authors and film makers. The group is supported by a large number of well-known authors, including Ramsey Campbell – its President – Clive Barker, Stephen King,

Charles L Grant, Fritz Leiber, Dean R Koontz and Stephen Donaldson.

Membership is open to anyone with an annual British subscription of £8.00. The US rate is \$18.00, in Canada you can join for \$19.00, in Europe for £10.00 and elsewhere for £15.00 – such a small price to pay for the opportunity to meet your favourite authors and read some of their fiction which hasn't been released by major publishers.

This year is especially important for BFS members and their friends, because of **The World Fantasy Convention.** Most of the major authors from the States will turn up to this gathering of the fantasy, horror and science fiction clans. You'll also meet dozens big-name British authors. If you madly want to go

The BRITISH FANTASY New/letter



Volume 14 - Number 3 - Spring 1988 - £1.00

to this event see our nightmare competition on page 46. If you also want to join the BFS write to **Di Wathen, 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5DE.**

SAMHAIN

A well prepared, professionally edited, fanzine which concentrates on film reviews and previews as well as on interviews with film makers.

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THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION



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snappily written, it shows a good knowledge of the industry, a dedication to film and the ability to bring off scoops and exclusives. John is also a dab-hand at layout and design. The limits of a monochrome magazine only show through in photographic material – which is often dimly reproduced, but the layouts draw your attention away from such paltry details.

Fortunately, an increasing number of specialist shops, including Forbidden Planet II and Andromeda in Birmingham, are taking stock of *Samhain*, but to ensure a copy it's better to order direct from *Samhain*, 19 Elm Grove Road, Topsham, Exeter, Devon EX3 0ED, price £1.25. Subscriptions are available for £7.50 for five issues in Britain, \$20.00 in the US, and £10.00 in Europe.



Fans of *The Prisoner* TV series, starring Patrick McGoohan, have always been a vociferous bunch and their dedicated Appreciation Society is no less so.

Six Of One is officially tied-in with ITC Entertainment, which owns the copyright for *The Prisoner* and is, therefore, able to use all the stills and series information which may normally be off-limits to magazines and similar groups. The Society was formed in 1977 and has a membership of more than 2,000 people worldwide.

It sends out four mailings a year containing *Number Six* magazine, catalogues of *Prisoner* memorabilia, news of meetings, private screenings and events, details of video and audio material available through the group, and information on all aspects of *The Prisoner*, past, present and future.

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More information can be obtained from **Six Of One, PO Box 66, Ipswich IP2 9TZ.**

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THE UNBLINKING EYE



The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.

So says HP Lovecraft at the beginning of his essay *Supernatural Horror In Literature – Dagon And Other Macabre Tales*, Arkham House, 1965. He may well be right, but so what? To the uninitiated, the uninterested and frequently disapproving non-reader of horror the question is: Why horror fiction? – seldom dignifying the genre with the word literature – Why horror comics, films, magazines?

Why all this fuss about something so flagrantly unpleasant as trying to frighten yourself for entertainment? To such people, the very idea of such a man as Lovecraft – or anyone – sitting down to write a book-length study on the subject is absurd, and the classics of horror are swiftly discounted as being dated, clumsy, or not horrific at all.

Instantly recognisable despite its many forms from Victorian ghost story to mad-slasher novel, horror fiction is as disliked by those who don't read it, as it is liked by those who do. Demonstrating to them the astonishing popularity of this type of fiction causes bewilderment and anger, as does pointing out that it has existed as long as all the other story-telling forms; for as long as mankind has needed to turn emotion and experience into art and entertainment.

DEVIL'S DEFINITIONS

Showing them the dictionary definitions make things much worse:

HORROR – Painful emotion of fear, dread, and repulsion; a great repugnance; that which excites dread and abhorrence.

FEAR – Painful emotion aroused by a sense of impending danger; alarm; dread.

TERROR – Extreme fear, violent dread . . .

You get the idea. Not very helpful. In fact, rather damaging to the argument. It doesn't sound a very enjoyable way of spending one's

leisure time, does it? Downright unhealthy, in fact. Probably only a step away from pornography. Certainly not much fun.

And yet there obviously is fun to be had in being scared in comparatively safe surroundings; in the pleasurable shudder when a writer or film-maker does his or her stuff. Those who don't like horror often get very cross indeed at the thought of the primarily youthful audience gleefully trying to outdo one another in recalling aloud the most gross, disgusting, and scary moments. The fact that the work under discussion often has all the literary merit of the back of a cereal packet reinforces the belief that the genre is nasty and fit only for depraved and decadent minds.

But even a very young child will close a book on finding a frightening picture – only to open it again for another look.

SAFE SCARES

Horror fiction exists to provide that possibility for safe confrontation, that desire to go back for another look. Mankind has spent most of the comparatively short time he has been in existence running, hunting, fighting, and fearing – and, as tools and language developed, listening to those fears and adventures retold, or viewing them as pictures. Indeed, damage to the animal subjects of many cave paintings and drawings in southern France tend to indicate that the hunters relived the hunt by hurling spears at the images.

The trappings of civilisation have brought with them new fears along with the comforts, and not everyone chooses to ignore that inborn urge to relive the fear and wonder of life, the power of dreams and the dread of the unknown. The spear-hurling cavemen could well have been young men preparing for the hunt, for the fight to the death, for the experience they had not yet had. Perhaps one of the functions of horror fiction is to metaphorically prepare us for some of the less pleasant parts of life.

Certainly most fans of horror fiction come to the genre in adolescence, usually graduating via horror in another medium – films, television, comics or even music. Horrific fairy stories and scary picture books have often

played a part in childhood, but have been set aside for other types of books as the child grows older. Depressingly often they are set aside and not replaced with any other reading at all, outside basic school work. The adults who complain about teenagers reading 'rubbish' should be grateful their kids are reading anything at all – and maybe ask themselves when they last read a good book of any kind.

THE REAL TABOO

The adolescent is mutating, experiencing strange growth, sprouting hair all over the place and having odd new, often poorly understood, feelings. He or she is having to come to terms with other important discoveries as well – like having been born into a world containing many problems, and into life containing many hitches, many of them not at all pleasant. Often the realisation comes that our world and our lives are, by their very natures, often extremely upsetting. With seemingly no one to share these troubles, these adolescents will often turn to books of all kinds, but most frequently to horror.

What seems to strike a chord, especially with boys, is that horror gets even. It is not content to set out the problems of life and examine them from a detached perspective, but gets down into the bad stuff. All the taboo material, all the things not to be spoken of in polite society are laid out for their inspection. Death, madness, and the possibility of return to a story of life from beyond the grave. More important, characters in a lot of horror fiction change, metamorphosing into something other, something different and misunderstood, something frequently unpleasant. In fact, the worst things imaginable happen to people in horror stories, providing a kind of safe rite of passage for the young reader.

NO ESCAPE

So horror certainly isn't escapist fiction, as is often argued. but unfortunately it often isn't good fiction of any kind. The elements of confrontation, of physical rebellion and uncontrollable change are what are most appealing to the young audience for horror, and in the mass market, in the look-alike '3.50 Dreadfuls' of today those elements are usually present during the setting up of the plot.

But those elements are then subverted and all too easily conquered, allowing for a conservative return to establishing values by the end of the story. This climatic cop-out is as disappointing

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as having the supernatural events explained away at the end of Gothic novels. Although these instant bestsellers are easy to read, exciting on a non-critical level, and certainly contain the expected gross-outs, this undermining of what horror is perceived to be about eventually brings about a loss of interest. 'Ah! his books are all the same', our young fan complains, and returns, sadder and wiser, to the television.

Even sadder is the perpetual adolescent, the fan who remains interested in the horror genre but stays in the easy reader phase – Not that these are peculiar to horror, as they can be seen and heard all over the place. This fellow never likes anything too literary or challenging. He hates to have his intelligence overestimated and does our argument with the unbeliever no good at all. He keeps buying the books he likes, though thereby helping to bring about a general lowering of literary standards on the part of both publisher and writer, and is responsible for a number of underachieving – though not necessarily in sales – writers who aim low and still miss.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

Fortunately, good work is still being produced and published, but it is often overlooked or undervalued. General critics tend to stay away from anything marketed as horror, fantasy or science fiction. The general rule is that 'if it's horror it can't be any good, and if it's good it can't be horror'.

Stephen King is perhaps the only writer to have transcended this attitude, his status as a bestseller outweighing the content of the books. Even then – in the UK, at least – he tends to get dismissive or condescending reviews. As a result, a lot of good horror-type fiction gets marketed as mainstream or thriller fiction, only to be ignored by horror fans, even some grown-up non-permanent adolescent ones, because they never read outside the horror label. An appreciation of good fiction only comes by reading good fiction – of as many different types as possible. Of course, no one can read everything, but an awareness of what can be done in other fields prevents both jadedness and the willingness to accept second, or even third, best.

So, we appear to be in danger of coming full circle here, our average seeker after strange literature seemingly as small-minded as those who want to ban the stuff. What fuel do we have remaining to throw on the fires of argument to

defeat the unbeliever? What defence, if any, does the mature, well-read, well-balanced horror fan have beyond cave dweller adrenalin and adolescent confusion/rebellion? There are probably as many complex motives and psychological explanations as there are readers of horror fiction. In the end, good fiction of any type is its own justification. If the book is a good one and not just a banal time waster, the reply to 'why do you read that gruesome stuff?' is: 'here, you read it. Tell me what you think of it'. It doesn't matter that only time will tell if the book is a true classic, good writing is good writing, and should be appreciated as such.

FEAR AND WONDER

Good horror fiction is only good fiction plus an ingredient or two – fear and wonder. In its many different forms: the ghost, the monster, the maniac, the surreal, the waking dream, and so on, it exists simply to shine some light on the darker side of the human condition.

And if the other side is still not converted, or at least willing to admit that there is some good among the dross, let them think on this: horror has always been at its most popular during periods of unrest and confusion, used as a rehearsal for the occurrence of things you really don't want to know about and as a reassurance that those things can be tamed, reduced to entertainment with which you can cope more easily. As we career towards the end of the century, the madness and mayhem increasing each day, so does the popularity of horror fiction increase as people seek to come to terms with escalating change and transformation. Not with senses blunted by violence, but with a knowledge, or at least a suspicion, of the changes and metamorphoses that violence may bring.

'I don't want to know – but I have to. I don't want to look, but I must'. The reader comes to the horror story with an awareness that the rules which govern our societies and our standards of behaviour are not all that strong, and can crack and come unglued under the slightest stress. It is the task of the writer of horror fiction to try and widen those cracks, to break down the wall and provide at least a glimpse of that which lies behind and beyond. The reader brings the desire to see beyond the wall, not glancing away, however much he or she may want to. To gaze with unblinking eyes at what is revealed.

The defence rests.

MIKE WATHEN

"General critics tend to stay away from anything marketed as horror, fantasy or science fiction."

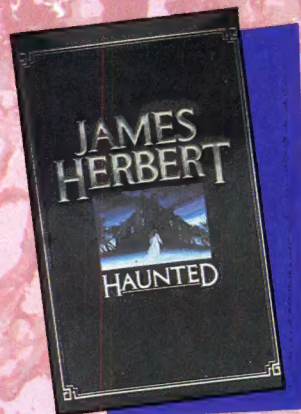


FEAR

PRESENTS:

The Big Three

Look forward to a piece of publishing history! Britain's top three horror writers in one incredible issue!



- **JAMES HERBERT** is *Haunted* by his success. We talk to Britain's master of horror and give away 12 signed copies of his latest hardback – rare items, indeed, we must be mad!
 - **STEPHEN KING** corners the fantasy market. We examine his new anthology *The Gunslinger* and look forward to other books in his *Dark Tower* fantasy series.
 - **SHAUN HUTSON** makes a move toward mainstream thriller fiction with his new hardback *Assassin*. **FEAR** visits some locations from the book and generally grovels at the feet of the Emperor of Excess.
- ALSO:**
- **INTERVIEWS** with Clive Barker and American authoress Sheri Tepper
 - **FICTION** from Brian Lumley and Stephen Laws
 - **THE SPOOK** is our very own gruesome gossip columnist. Would you party with her?
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Imperial Monoscan
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Imperial Monoscan
Ref: GW 5/b (Earth)

++ Personal Report of Brother LOU WONG +++ Coded transmission - Priority Channel +++

Since accidentally entering the Timescape I have come across a number of varied and interesting places, but none more so than my present location, a GAMES WORKSHOP store on Ancient Earth. These shops are filled with incredible amounts of astounding gaming material, including ALL the brand new Games Workshop products. More than that, each shop has, on average, over 30,000 Citadel Miniatures, from Snotlings to Marine Dreadnought Armour!

Even better, the managers and staff of these shops are all friendly and eager to help (without me having to shoot any of them too), so I strongly recommend a return visit at a later date. GAMES WORKSHOP stores are without doubt the answer to any Imperial Marine's gaming needs... Message ends...STOP++

GAMES WORKSHOP stores can provide you with all your gaming needs, from board, roleplaying and family games to CITADEL MINIATURES and WHITE DWARF Magazine. We now have a total of eleven shops in the UK as well as one in the US, all of which provide an excellent service with friendly staff and managers. Please also note that some of our shops are now closed one day a week. You can find our shops in the following places:

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*Innocence
proves
nothing*

